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ALLAH CRIES FOR BLOOD

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ALLAH CRIES FOR BLOOD

A ROMANCE OF LOVE AND ADVENTURE
IN THE FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION

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FOREWORD

IN the main this story is entirely fictional, but it has a basis, if not on fact, at least on a persistent legend, of which I have heard varying accounts from an *ex-légionnaire*, a civilian, and a soldier serving in the regular French Army and who was at one time in Morocco. The legend tells of a white man who was a great personal friend of Ab-del-Krim, and who, out of his own pocket, supplied him with quite a quantity of contraband munitions during the early part of the campaign, and who lived and fought with the Riffs through most of it. The legend tells also of his beautiful daughter who was with him throughout, habitually dressed as a man.

That Krim had a scheme for encouraging desertion from the Legion, and aided many deserters to leave the country seems to be a well-established fact. Also that he had an efficient secret service, the head of which was said to be a Frenchman.

It is on these subjects of common talk and gossip in the barrack-room and camp during the Moroccan Campaign that this little romance has been built.

W.J.E.

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CHAPTER I

THE GUN-RUNNER

"**A**S idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean . . .!" So Samuel Taylor Coleridge described, in one inspired line, a complete sea-scape familiar to the eye of every sailor who ever wandered the seas "in sail."

The s.s. *Induna*—no sailing ship, but just a battered old tramp steamer—as she floated placidly upon the almost pond-like sea, fulfilled in appearance exactly the picture the poet had drawn when he wrote of the vessel in which the Ancient Mariner made his fatal voyage.

But though the ship herself may have looked idle enough as she lay, hove to, under the flat blue sky and the blazing sun, there was no idleness aboard her. There it was a case of "all hands to the pumps"—except that the pumps were about the one part of the ship's equipment, other than the propellers, which were not being worked on at that moment.

Remarkable changes were going on aboard the *Induna*—changes which would have greatly interested any naval patrol-boat belonging to the navy of any country.

For as the detective of fiction, sitting before a mirror in his dressing-room, completely changes

his appearance and disguises himself out of all recognition in the space of a few minutes, so, amazingly enough, was the *Induna* being disguised by the horde of men who swarmed busily about her decks (the *Induna* carried an unusually large crew for her size and presumed trade).

The First Mate stood on the fo'c'sle directing his section of the work from there; the Second was right aft, doing likewise; amidships the Third was in charge—and the Old Man, standing on the bridge, watched over the whole of the proceedings with the wary and all seeing eye of a nautical Jove.

And a queer process it certainly was that was going on aboard the *Induna*! Around her battered sides, just below the bulwarks and above the first line of portholes, there ran a sort of bulging, ornamental scrollwork, which extended from stem to stern, and was apparently a relic of better days, when the old *Induna* might have been a new, and smart, vessel. Now, from this scrollwork by means of wires which passed down sunken grooves and through ingenious pulleys in her sides, long strips of painted canvas were being drawn down, as roller-blinds (which they very much resembled in their working) might have been.

And when this little job had been completed—behold! the sides of the *Induna* were completely altered. No longer shabby black, battered and rusty, they were now a smooth, shining and glossy white, broken by a wide scarlet line just below that curious scrollwork bulge, which served at other times to hide this ingenious “gadget.”

Men swarmed over the sides, slung in “cradles,” and in a surprisingly short time scrollwork and

bulwarks were also transformed by their busy brushes and patent, quick-drying paint.

Meantime others were busy on deck. Parts of the superstructure, both fore and aft, were taken down in sections and removed below. The two long, black funnels were also removed, and replaced by a single short, squat wide one, shaped like a thick but very short Turkish cigarette. The new funnel, like the sides of the vessel, was white, with a scarlet band. Canvas "blinds," or screens, similar to those used to transform the ship's sides, served the same purpose for what was left of the deck-housing, completely covering the dirt and damage which had distinguished the old superstructure. A little "spit-and-polish," and new white canvas "dodgers," etc., similarly transformed the bridge and other parts of the vessel. Lastly new name-plates were brought up and screwed into place—and so, in the short space of a couple of hours or so, the ancient tramp s.s. *Induna* became metamorphosized into the smart (and obviously fast) s.y. *Clytie*—as remarkable a piece of sea-disguising as anyone could wish to see!

Very definitely one member of that numerous crew was interested in the process. He had been told off to aid in the painting of the bulwarks, and, although he appeared to be working most industriously, a close observer would have noted that his eyes and his attention were all over the place, and that very little that was happening within the range of those keen blue eyes of his was being missed.

Presently, his section of the job finished, he swung himself agilely over the rail and back on

to the deck once more. Then, paint "kettle" and brushes in hand, he made his way back to the forepart of the ship, where, at the break of the fo'c'sle, he handed over his painting outfit, and then climbed the ladder and made his way right for'ard.

The same mythical observer mentioned just now would have noted, looking at this young man, that he was very young, very good-looking and very much unlike the average deck hand of either a tramp steamer like the old *Induna*, or even a smart steam-yacht like the new *Clytie*. He would be about nineteen years of age, with light brown, crisp-curling hair, keen but humorous blue eyes, and a tall, rather slender, but athletic figure.

This imaginary observer of ours would have immediately said to himself: "English-public-school type—probably run away from home." And he would have been right, every time!

In full, this young man's name was James Baird McNiel. It was his own name, and he had never changed it—since he had no reason to be ashamed of it himself, and did not consider that he had done, or was likely to do, anything to disgrace it, or to make it ashamed of *him*, for all that he was an outcast from the proud Scottish family of which he was a member, and a wanderer and adventurer in the wild places of the earth.

Jim McNeil was attached to the starboard watch, and the starboard watch was, technically, off duty. And now that the job of transforming the ship was over—at any rate so far as his share in it was concerned—he was entitled to finish his "watch below" until the first dog-watch at four

p.m. And even as he walked forward seven bells was struck—which meant he still had a half-hour.

So he walked to the extreme bow of the vessel, and, seating himself on a coil of rope, lit his pipe. As he sat there, smoking gently and reflectively, our observer would have noted that his face was more than merely good-looking. It was definitely an "interesting" face, and, did our observer happen to be a bit of a psychologist as well, he would doubtless have noted that it was a singularly strong face, and a decidedly obstinate one. The face of a man who was naturally an altruist—but who might easily, under pressure of circumstances, develop into something very much the reverse. And, as such, likely to be more than a little dangerous, too! There was also something dynamic about this young man which suggested that, whatever he might be, he would never be just a nonentity.

To the skipper, standing on the bridge, there came a strange and incongruous figure—at least, she would have looked incongruous aboard the *Induna*, but did not look so out of place aboard the *Clytie*. She was a slip of a girl—a dark brunette dressed very plainly in a linen jumper and a navy-blue skirt with no stockings and white deck-shoes.

The skipper (who was also the Owner, and whose names were as varied as were the lights in his daughter's dark eyes) turned as she approached, and his hard, and rather grim face relaxed into a smile.

"Hullo," he greeted her. "Just finishing the job of making the old girl look beautiful!"

The girl smiled back at him, and those two smiles told the whole story of their owners' relations with each other. Plainly, they were more than father and daughter—they were also comrades and friends.

The girl ran her eyes over the length and breadth of the vessel, and the expression in her eyes was similar to that one might display when gazing on a favourite and beloved dog.

"So I see!" she said. "She looks smart, doesn't she? But I'm not sure I don't like her best in her old clothes, all the same!"

Captain Royston (to give him the name which had made him famous—or infamous—along most of the coasts of the world) smiled a trifle wistfully back at her.

"Perhaps I do, also!" he agreed. "But needs must when a certain party drives, and since, as Shakespeare once said: 'All the world's a stage'—I don't see why the Old Girl shouldn't masquerade with the rest of us! Though, for that matter, I don't even know that it is a masquerade—for she's no more an old tramp than she is a posh private yacht; and she's just as much a battleship as either of them, anyway!"

And the girl, thinking of the long, wicked-looking guns stowed away in their ingeniously-constructed hiding-places aboard, nodded, and her dark eyes sparkled a trifle.

Captain Royston went on:

"And, speaking of masquerading, my dear—we shall be raising the land soon, and we shall anchor off Montevideo this evening. I shall be going ashore, in the character of Samuel Pryce, the British

millionaire—with daughter and party! So you'd better just run along and make yourself look like a millionaire's daughter, right away!"

Her dark, handsomely-arched eyebrows were raised as she looked him in the face, and said:

"So that's it, is it? Going to run the cargo to-night, Dad?"

And he answered, with a grim smile:

"No, to-morrow night—and right under the noses of most of those who'd most gladly hang me if they knew who I was, or what I was up to! I'll make some of the blighters sit up, before I've done with 'em, so I will! Had the colossal impudence to tell me I couldn't run a cargo of arms for the Uruguayan rebels, did they? And then saw to it that the agents of the Uruguayan Government saw the old *Induna* take the stuff aboard! Clever pups! But there won't seem to be much connexion, to the heads in Monte, between the old *Induna*, commanded by the notorious Cap'n Royston, and the steam-yacht *Clytie*, belonging to Pryce, the millionaire, will there? And when I ask all the big-wigs on board for a *coroboree* tomorrow night, they'll not only never dream that I've got a cargo of contraband on board, but they'll surely never even suspect that *they themselves* are helping me to land it! Ha-ha!"

The girl laughed, too. She clapped her hands in delight:

"Clever old Daddie! And oh, what an adventure! Is there any danger at all?"

The skipper smiled again, and again there was a touch of grimness in his smile:

"Just a spot of it, maybe! I should hate to think what those beggars would do if they got wind of my little game!"

The girl laughed:

"Never mind about that!" she said. "They won't!"

And she said it in a tone that implied it was a matter of some regret to her that they wouldn't. Carol Royston had a father who was—well, what he was! Her mother had been the daughter of a French explorer, and had been, probably, one of the very first white women to penetrate into the heart of Morocco, with her husband. Furthermore Carol, now seventeen, had already been the constant companion of her widowed father—the most notorious and cleverest gun-runner in the "trade"—since he had, on her mother's death, taken her from the French convent-school where she had been educated. Small wonder, then, that she had something of a taste for adventure!

"By the way," remarked Carol. "You mentioned a 'party' just now, Dad. You are going to be a millionaire, and I am going to play my original part (created by myself) of your daughter. But where on earth are the 'and party' coming from?"

"We shall have two or three rich admirers of yours in tow—goodness knows you're lovely enough to have plenty of admirers, rich or poor. Now, I am a man of foresight, my dear! You remember I signed on three rather nice-looking young fellows at B.A.? Well, they were specially engaged (at enormous salaries) to play the parts of the said admirers, for two performances only—to-night and to-morrow night! See?"

"Oh!" A blush crept over the soft, ivory pallor of her cheeks, and her eyes sparkled more than ever. "I say, Dad—is young McNiel—one of them?"

(And McNiel, who was sitting on his coil of rope and puffing gentle clouds of smoke into the almost breezeless air—with his eyes fixed on father and daughter on the distant bridge—never so much as felt his ears grow any warmer!)

Captain Royston gave his daughter a quick, keen glance, and said drily:

"As a matter of fact he is! But you will remember, my dear, that I mentioned the engagement was for two performances only!"

"Yes, I heard that!" the girl sighed a little, and turned rather abruptly away; "Well, I'll go and make myself look beautiful, right away!" There was a touch of forced carelessness in her tone.

"No need to do that, my love!" said the skipper, with a note in his voice his men would not have recognized. "God, in his great kindness, has done that for you!"

It was noticeable that he spoke in a tone of deep sincerity—almost of reverence—and that she blushed at the compliment though made by her father.

Maybe she was thinking of Jim McNiel, and wondering whether he felt the same way about her!

A moment before she had left the bridge, to Jim McNiel sitting and puffing on his coil of rope there came a short, thin individual, with a face and form strongly reminiscent of a sparrow. This

fellow was carrying a bucket, which he set gently on the deck, what time he studied the unconscious face of James Baird McNiel, and then followed the direction of his absorbed gaze. After which the "sparrow" nodded to himself, picked the pail up, and put it down again with a loud clatter.

Jim started and turned to him. Then he laughed:

"What cheer, Nippo! You made me jump!" .

"I should say so!" agreed Nippo, who then revealed a strong Cockney accent. "Jumped from a bit of an 'ight, too, didn't yer, matey?"

"Aye!" said Jim, with a faint smile. "I was up in the clouds all right!"

"No, you wasn't!"

"What the devil d'you mean, I wasn't?"

"No more you was! 'Cos why? 'Cos if the perishin' ship's bridge was up in the blinkin' clouds, 'ow the 'ell would she be steered? Tell me that, me bonnie brown son! No, old cock, the answer to that one is that you weren't up in no clouds! You was up on the bridge of this old 'ooker, wiv your arm round the waist of that little piece of skirt up there . . .!"

"Nark it, Nippo!" commanded Jim, sharply, speaking to the Cockney in his own language. "Don't speak of a lady as 'a little bit of skirt'—and don't forget you're talking about the Skipper's daughter, either!"

The little Cockney's chin went out, and his thin arms went akimbo instantly:

"Ho! So that's it, is it? All right, me lucky lad! *I'm* not fergittin' that she's the Old Man's daughter—it's you that's doin' that! Lookin' at 'er like a blinkin' moon-struck codfish, an' goin' all soft and

sloppy over 'er! Don't *you* fergit 'oo she is, me lad—an' don't fergit, neither, that the Old Man's blinkin' 'andy wiv them shooters of 'is—an' that 'e ain't likely to stand fur 'is daughter 'avin' anything to do with a perishin' foremast 'and, neither!"

McNiel, usually a sufficiently aggressive individual, took no direct or immediate notice of the Cockney's words, but they seemed to start a train of thought in his brain—and not a pleasant one, if his face was any indication of its purport. A look of combined sadness and bitterness crept into his eyes, and twisted the corners of his strong mouth. He made a weary, hopeless sort of gesture with one hand. Then, with a slight start, he pulled himself together, and answered, with a half-hearted attempt at airiness:

"I dare say you mean well, Nippo—and no doubt all you say is true! Nevertheless, I suggest you mind your own damned business, if it's all the same to you!"

But the little Cockney, as quick as he was uneducated, and as soft-hearted as he was pugnacious, had seen that look, and it had struck him right to the heart. In a moment his skinny hand was on the broad shoulder of his chum and he spoke in a tone faintly tremulous with emotion:

"Why, matey—is it like that? Blimey, but I'm sorry, old son—I didn't know! Anyway, buck up—old Royston may be the King of the gun-runners, and he may be mighty 'andy with his shooters—but 'e ain't Gawd Almighty! You go in an' win, my lad—an' good luck to yer!"

But McNiel made an impatient gesture:

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of Royston! It's *her* I was thinking of, and . . .!"

He had evidently said more than he intended to, and bit his sentence off short.

Nippo gave him a quick glance:

"Don't be a perishin' mug!" he adjured him. "Why, if she's got any eyes at all, she'll jump at you! Wiv a clock like yours, an' . . .!"

But McNiel flared up at last:

"Oh, for God's sake shut up—and don't interfere in what doesn't concern you!" he snapped, and, turning on his heel, walked over to the rail. The Cockney looked after him, and slowly scratched his right ear.

"Blimey! Ain't 'arf got it bad, 'e ain't!" he muttered to himself. "But what a blinkin' fuss to make over a girl! An' a real sailor's supposed to 'ave one in every port! But there, old Jimmy ain't no real sailor no more'n what I am! 'E's a toff, that's wot 'e is—as sure as I'm a Billingsgate porter wot's gone too far to sea!"

And he went off about his business, grinning philosophically.

In the meantime the change in the old *Induna's* appearance was spreading to her crew. The First Mate had just reappeared on the bridge, now wearing a super-smart gilt-edged Captain's uniform. He took over, while the Second Mate dived below, to reappear shortly attired similarly as First Officer. The Third now metamorphosized himself from Third Mate of an old tramp to Second Officer of a smart private yacht, and the Old Man himself appeared on deck attired in white flannel trousers, a blue reefer coat, and a plain "cheese-cutter"

yachting cap—every inch the opulent owner of a handsome yacht!

For'ard the cry went up from the bo'sun:

"Stubbard watch, there! Lay up on deck—and make it slippy, too!"

Highly mystified, the starboard watch rolled up from below or from odd corners of the deck, and ranged themselves into a ragged line on the fo'c'sle. They were even more mystified when they saw that the bo'sun had with him three assistants, drawn from the port watch, who were loaded sky-high with brown-paper parcels.

"Now, my lads!" the bo'sun addressed them. "You've seen how we've changed the Old Girl, and it just follows you've got to change, too!" He ran a contemptuous eye along the line. "I must say you don't look much like the crew of a smart, natty little steam-yacht like the *Clytie* as you are now! I've servin' you all out with new, brassbound uniforms! Pass along here, one at a time, and take your parcels—then get below an' change your duds, slippy, before you take over the watch! Step lively, there!"

"Aha!" Jim muttered to Nippo, who was next to him in the line. "That explains why the Old Man sent me to a tailor when he signed me on in Buenos Aires! I've been wondering about that!"

"Then you'd better go on wondering!" retorted Nippo. "'Cos 'e never sent *me*—an' I've worn this uniform a time or two before!"

"Oh!" said McNiel, and looked puzzled.

He looked still more bewildered when he stepped smartly up to the bo'sun to be met with:

"Not you, my lad! You stay as you are!"

Jim was more than a little astonished at this, but was a trifle consoled when he found that another young fellow, an Irishman named O'Leary, who had signed on at the same time as himself, and who had also been sent to the tailors, was treated in the same way.

"Sure, an' phwat phwill the game be, d'ye think?" O'Leary asked him.

"You've got me, there!" answered McNiel. "Say, I wonder if Timson's in the same boat?" Timson was a young American, who had also signed on at the same time. Sure enough, when the port watch came off, and had their uniforms served out to them, Timson was not given one!

"Wal," he remarked to his companions in misfortune. "This gets me beat! Unless the Old Man reckons we ain't swell enough to carry the glad rags . . . !"

The third mate (Second Officer, now) came bustling forward:

"O'Leary, McNiel *and* Timson?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" the three answered, in one voice.

"The Owner wants you aft! You'll find him by the companion-hatch. Step lively, now!"

"'Curiouser and curiouser!' as Alice said," remarked McNiel, as they made their way aft.

"Thru' enough!" agreed O'Leary. "And who might this Alice have been, now? Shure, I knew a bit of a colleen of that name, back in Liverpool, who . . . !"

"Same name—different stable!" grinned McNiel. Then: "S'sh! The Old Man!"

Captain Royston was waiting for them, beside

the companionway which led to the after cabins. He eyed them, as they lined up before him, with a chilled-steel eye.

"Listen, you gazookers!" he opened up on them. "Maybe you kid yourselves I signed you on at B.A. just because I thought you looked such darned fine seamen? Well, you miss your guess, if that's so! I signed you on because you looked the damn-fool types I wanted to work a trick on these dirty greasers here at Montevideo! Now, listen! From now on, for a couple of days, you're no longer members of my crew. I'm not Cap'n Royston any longer! I'm Old Sam Pryce, British millionaire, and you're three wealthy and useless young guests of mine, all after my money-bags and my daughter!" His expression changed a little. The eyes hardened to points of flickering light, and the thin-lipped mouth drew into an ugly line. "And if any of you take advantage of that," he went on, "I'll cut your hearts out, and hang 'em round your neck! And don't forget it! Play up to me, and there's an extra twenty dollars on your pay at the end of the voyage—try to play *with* me, and I'll shoot you like the dogs you are! Get that?"

And, with expressionless faces, the three answered:

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Good! When you went to that tailor's in B.A., I got you an outfit for the occasion. You'll find the duds in the cabin you're sharing aft here, whilst this play-acting lasts. I want you to get below in a minute, and change into the yachting rig. Got that?"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Good! Then, from now on, till I say the word and send you back to your kennel in the fo'c'sle, you're no longer my men, but my guests! And play the part properly, or I'll scrag you all!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Right! *Steward . . . !*"

A long, lean man, in a spotless white jacket with brass buttons, came up through the hatch like a Jack-in-the-box:

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Take these *gentlemen*—*Mister O'Leary, Mister Timson, and Mister McNiel*, down and show them to their cabin! And, as it's nearly lunch-time, see that they have a cocktail!"

The steward, looking at the three rough, dirty, and rather sheepish-looking sailors, gave a cross between a gasp and a choke, which he managed to turn into a cough, and then led the way hastily below, with a quavering:

"This way . . . *gentlemen . . . if you please!*"

Feeling vaguely that this was probably a dream, and that they would wake up soon, the three foremast-hands walked into the large, roomy, and luxuriously fitted cabin and stared around them, rather like children at a freak-show.

"About them cocktails—er—*gentlemen!*" The steward seemed to have some difficulty in articulating.

"Faith, an' I'd sooner have a clane beer!" murmured O'Leary. "'Tis so many years since I sipped rot-gut, I've most forgotten phwat it tastes like, so I have!"

"Cocktails, the Skip—I mean the *Owner*—said!" the steward reminded him.

"Oh, make it phwat ye like, then—I'm not caring!" said the Irishman.

"A dry Martini for me!" ordered McNiel, with the manner born. The steward started slightly, and shot a quick glance at him.

"Same here!" announced the American, curtly, and the steward vanished.

"Wal!" exploded Timson, after another glance around. "This beats the band, this does!"

"'Tis a foine idea, so it is!" commented the Irishman, with satisfaction. "I'll be gettin' a dacint meal now and again, maybe, for the next two days!"

"Aye, and some real hard drinks!" put in the Yank.

But Jimmie McNiel said nothing. Beneath the blue jersey he was peeling off, his heart was singing in his bosom like a bird. For over a month he had been eating out his heart with love for a dream—a shadow—a beautiful picture upon which he could look from afar, but could never touch!

And now . . . his shadow had taken substance! His picture had come to life; his dream had come true. For a few hours he would be near her—able to speak to her, and, maybe (if God was very kind) to touch her. Afterwards—well, he never thought about the afterwards. What boy in love ever did, anyway?

CHAPTER II

MASQUERADE!

FEW of the crew they had been working and messing with for something like five weeks would have recognized the three young men as they emerged from their cabin at the summons of the luncheon bugle (plus a hoarse, and somewhat embarrassed hint from the steward, who didn't know at all what to make of things!).

They entered the saloon. Two of them definitely awkwardly, and a little uncertain what to do. But the third one—Jimmy McNiell to wit—strode in with an air of calm self-assurance which surprised even himself. For he was full of self-confidence—a self-confidence which he himself could find no reason for, unless it was that, born and educated a gentleman, he was now habited like one, and in fitting surroundings, and just took to them and fitted in, as a duck fits into its circumambient water! It might have been that—or it might have been something else. . . !

The Old Man—"Mr. Pryce, millionaire," now—was standing by the table, and greeted them in a voice the tone of which made the unfortunate steward jump visibly. He described it afterwards as: "Genial-like—as though butter wouldn't melt in his blasphemous mouth!"

"Well, boys!" was the greeting. "Had a good morning?"

Timson answered, awkwardly and from force of habit:

"Aye, aye, sir!" And the Old Man glared at him ferociously.

"Bedad, an' I've had a surprising one, if that's anything!" was the reply of O'Leary, whose sense of humour was always getting the better of him. But McNiell answered:

"Topping, sir, thanks!" in an easy, cultured voice which made his companions, as well as their "host" stare at him.

But he did not notice their looks, for, at that moment, another person had entered the room—Carol Royston!

They all turned to look at her—and the eyes of them all, including her father, held admiration. But in the eyes of Jim McNiell there was something infinitely more than just that!

She looked a picture. She was wearing a natty, well-tailored suit of white serge, with a coat cut on nautical lines, and a pleated skirt. Her eyes were on the three of them as she entered—including them all in a faint, half-pleasant, half-ironical smile of greeting.

"Better introduce you, I suppose!" growled the Old Man, with a frown. "Boys, this is my daughter, Carol! Carol, let me present to you—*Mister Timson . . . !*" (The American clicked his heels together and bowed smartly. "I guess the pleasure's all mine!" was his response.) "*. . . Mister O'Leary . . . !*" The Irishman went very red, thrust out a huge, work-calloused hand, and blurted out: "Faith, an' 'tis pleased to meet ye Oi am!" His brogue had noticeably broadened

from sheer embarrassment. “. . . And *Mister* McNiel . . . !”

Their eyes met, and it seemed to Jimmy that their glances fused like the meeting of two “live” electric wires. Then his heart leapt madly as he saw that a visible blush crept into the ivory smoothness of her cheeks. She hadn’t blushed when she greeted the others . . . !

There was another difference, too. The blush was only momentary, and a small, white, well-manicured hand was almost timidly extended in his direction. McNiel took the hand, very gently and lightly, and in an easy voice said:

“How do you do!”

He was keeping control of himself only by an effort, at the success of which he himself was wondering greatly.

He took his seat and found that, luckily, he was sitting on her left. Had he been opposite her he would most certainly have betrayed himself, having to look directly at her—and the Old Man, he knew, had eyes like a hawk! He was not scared of the Old Man—but he *was* mortally scared of having his few hours of Paradise curtailed!

The meal passed off without incident. The American ate like a well-brought-up American would. The Irishman was horribly nervous, and didn’t know which of the tools to use. But he was clever enough to watch the others and imitate them—except when, embarrassed by a word from the Old Man, he used a steel knife in mistake for his fish-eater, and afterwards corrected his mistake, with a fiery face, by substituting the fish-knife, and wiping the other one on his table-napkin.

But McNiel ate with the obvious ease of one used to a decent table, and chatted lightly about nothing at all in true Society manner. The Old Man, from time to time, eyed him with a curious frown on his face. After lunch, when Carol had left them, he tackled him:

"Say, you—McNiel! You ever been an actor, hey?"

"Why, no!" answered Jimmy, and added, with a certain amount of point: "As a matter of fact, *Mr. Pryce*, it's one of the few things I never have been!"

The Old Man caught the hint, and a nasty glint came into his eyes.

"Oh!" he snorted. "Reckon you were *born* a gentleman, then!"

"Why, of course!" was the easy reply. "I should hardly be the guest of a millionaire if that were not so, I should imagine!"

At which the Old Man had the grace to grin with grudging approval, and then to turn the conversation.

In the fo'c'sle, meanwhile, there was a good deal of mystification, and a certain amount of perturbation, about the apparently complete disappearance of the trio. They had been summoned aft by the Old Man—they had been seen to go down the companion, looking rather startled, under the escort of the steward—and they had been neither seen nor heard of since!

"Reckon they've upset the Old Man!" "Hairy" Adams was saying. "An' he's bumped 'em off! 'Spect they've been making eyes at his gal, or sumptin!"

"*Mon Dieu*, an' I do not blame zem for zat!" exclaimed Pierre, the Frenchy. "See, she has just come on ze deck—ah! how beautiful—how ravishing is she! No wonder if zey make ze eye at her!"

"I know one thing!" said Nippo. "And that ain't two! Young Mac's my pal, an' if that perishin' old crook 'as 'urt an 'air of 'is 'ead—I'll bust 'im! I'll push 'is ugly mug right through 'is own greasy black 'air! I'll . . . !"

Nippo broke off suddenly, and craned his head in an attitude of concentrated attention. A young man had emerged from the companion-hatch. He was a fresh, bright-looking young exquisite, with nicely oiled hair, super-clean face and a definite public-school air. He was dressed in the conventional yachting-rig, white trousers, with knife-edge crease, navy-blue reefer jacker, with plain gilt-buttons, and a yachting-cap set jauntily on his head.

He took one quick look around him, saw Carol standing by the rail, and strolled over to her with that air of easy carelessness which only an English gentleman can successfully assume.

Nippo's face was a study!

He stared like one who had been smitten by some strange sort of semi-paralysis. His eyes, always a trifle fishy in appearance, were goggling more than usual; his jaw had dropped, giving his face a vacant expression, and he held his head slightly at one side, in the manner of a terrier gazing at some insect which he cannot quite be certain of. In fact, one could almost see Nippo's ears cocking as he gazed!

For, although the distance was not inconsiderable, and it was difficult to be certain, that young man certainly bore a strange resemblance to the missing Mac!

He was standing beside the skipper's daughter, now, talking to her. And she was laughing back at him, and chatting with the ease one displays in talking to an equal. . . . Mechanically, Nippo's left arm was elevated, and he slowly scratched his ear. . . .

The bo'sun came bustling for'ard:

"Hy, you—Nippo! Just lay aft and lend a hand polishing up that brasswork! And look lively—we'll be raising land in an hour or so!"

"Aye, ay!" answered Nippo, mechanically.

Then he briskened, for he realized that he could pass along the starboard side, and so get a near look at the phenomenon that was puzzling him so. He hurried off.

His pace slackened as he neared the chatting couple. He couldn't get a proper view of the young man's face, but what he could see of it was strangely reminiscent of his chum. One or two characteristic little gestures, too. . . .

He slowed down almost to a halt as he stared. Then the girl, with a laughing remark, over her shoulder, ran lightly towards the companion—and the young man turned to follow her with his eyes. Now Nippo got a full and complete view of him, and his jaw dropped once more. His eyes were protruding like those of a dyspeptic codfish.

McNiell (for, of course, it was he) suddenly noticed him, realized the cause of his strange

expression, and, with some difficulty, stifled a grin. Then he took a step forward, and said in the same accent as he had been using in the saloon—and which was very different from the one he used in the fo'c'sle:

"Is it part of your duties aboard this—ah—yacht to stand and gape at your master's guests, my man? Get about your business at once, or I shall have to report you to the boatswain person, or whatever you call him!"

Poor Nippo stared more than ever. This was just the sort of tone a toff used in speaking to blokes like him—and yet, if this wasn't Jimmy McNiel, he'd be. . . .

"I say, are you going to be sea-sick, or something, what?" There was a note of condescending concern in the young man's tone now, which puzzled poor Nippo more than ever! "By the way, do you smoke?"

Somehow, by a mighty effort, Nippo got out the single monosyllable:

"Yus!"

"Yes—*what* . . . ?" The young man's tone was arrogant, now.

"Yus—*Sir!*"

"That's better! Have a cigar?"

With a hand that trembled as with an ague, Nippo took the proffered weed, and glanced at the band. It was a Corona-Corona!

"Now get about your work, my man!"

Nippo went off, but slowly, and with a mind that whirled and scintillated like a mad kaleidoscope! A vague sort of notion was taking form at the back of his brain. Of course, he had always

known that Mac was not just an ordinary beach-comber, or even a sailor. There was always that touch of the toff about him, as though he had seen better days. . . ! Supposing this bloke, who was so much like him, except in speech, was his brother, who had got aboard somehow. . . . *That* might explain it. . . !

Then Nippo gave a violent start, and stopped dead. He was just passing the companion-hatch, and even as he drew level with it there emerged therefrom yet another young man. This one was clad in spotless white drill, plus a slightly flamboyant school-tie. But the red, grinning face, for all that it seemed to have been shaved, scraped, boiled and polished, was, without doubt, that of the Irishman, O'Leary. . . !

The Irishman, catching sight of Nippo's comic face and expression, thought of the same joke as Mac had done—but in his case the accent was not changed, and was quite unmistakable:

"Phwill ye be removin' that ugly mug of yours from impedin' the vision of a gintleman, and standin' between him and the view?" inquired O'Leary, grinning broadly. "Or phwill I have to be after askin' me friend, the Owner, to have ye put in irons?"

Nippo turned away, shaking his head sadly as he went:

"Dippy! Scewey!" he muttered, as he went on his way. "Balmy on the blinkin' crumpet! That's what's the matter with *me*! Qualifyin' for the perishin' looney-bin, I am! Can't see nothin' else for it!"

But by the time he had finished his brasswork, and gone back to the fo'c'sle, the news was all over the ship—that, in furtherance of some cunning wheeze of his, the Old Man had translated three of his roustabout deck-hands into "guests," for the time being!

Nippo was righteously indignant:

"Gor'blimey!" was his comment on the news. "You wait till I get that dirty tyke Mac by himself! Won't I just show him something, eh? You watch me!"

In due course they sighted Montevideo, lying at the mouth of the La Plata River, and soon after they were dropping anchor well out in the estuary. Some care was taken as to the exact manner of anchoring the *Clytie*, which was finally done so that she presented her full starboard broadside to the city.

In the meantime Jimmy McNiel, always a man who knew what he wanted and went out to get it without preamble or delay, was making the most of his time. Carol Royston seemed pleased enough to be with him, and happy enough to listen to his conversation. There was a slight shade of embarrassment, however, in her attitude towards him, which Jimmy modestly put down to the fact that she was aware of his real position aboard. He did not realize—although from one or two remarks carelessly let drop he knew that she had noticed him before his metamorphosis—that it was actually due to the fact that she had, for some time, been thinking rather too much about him. Had he done so he would have been even happier than he was, and that is saying a lot!

Almost immediately the anchor was dropped, the First Officer took over, and the Captain (according to the new constitution of the *Clytie's* personnel) went off in the motor-launch, with the British ensign trailing proudly behind it. His mission was to issue invitations to certain individuals of importance in Montevideo—such as the Chief of Police, and so on—to meet the well-known millionaire (who was at that moment actually sitting comfortably before a fire in the study of his fine old Surrey mansion!) as his guest at the principal hotel in the city that evening!

This mission was the subject of some conversation among the "millionaire's guests," and Jim asked Carol whether she had ever previously met any of the higher officials of South American republics. She answered that she had, one or two.

"What do you think of them?" Jim asked her.

She shrugged her pretty shoulders and smiled expressively:

"Very courteous as a rule—but just a trifle flowery!" she suggested.

"That's their attitude to a pretty girl!" said Jim—and Carol blushed delightfully. "But to men they're pretty bumptious, to say the least of it! Why, the Minister of the Interior of one of these twopenny-halfpenny Republics—not much bigger than London, at that—gives himself more airs, and puts on more dignity, than the Prime Minister of England himself! They're a scream!"

Carol was looking at him with renewed interest, struck by the fact that he had, quite unconsciously, betrayed the fact that he was familiar with the

deportment of the Prime Minister of England. She answered mechanically with the comment:

"'Beggars on horseback,' you know!"

McNiel smiled a trifle wryly:

"Well, when it comes to beggars on horseback . . .!" he said, and glanced down expressively at his well-cut clothes.

Carol's blush turned to a hot flush of embarrassment, as she realized the twist he had put to her words.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, impulsively. "I—I didn't mean *that*, Mr. McNiel! Besides, it's ridiculous, anyway—I'm perfectly certain you have never been a beggar of any sort, or at any time!"

His turn to flush, darkly, beneath his tan:

"Thank you! All the same, I was in a pretty bad hole, when your father signed me on in Buenos Aires!" He laughed, suddenly. "And I flattered myself he did it because he thought I looked a good sailor—instead of which he did it because he thought I would make a convincing lounge-lizard! A sad blow to my vanity, Miss Royston!"

Carol laughed:

"Don't be silly! No one in the world would take you for a lounge-lizard, any more than a beggar! And do remember, you must not call me 'Miss Royston'—I'm 'Miss Pryce' for the time being!"

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Jim. "I forgot! I forget such a lot of things, when I'm with you, you know!"

She blushed again, and Jim was encouraged to sudden boldness:

"No!" he murmured, reflectively. "I've done a lot of funny things, for a fellow my age—but I've

never begged for anything yet! But I've a fancy I may do, before long . . .!"

He looked her straight in the eyes as he said this, and there could be no mistaking his meaning! Carol turned her face away in some confusion. For the sake of something to say, she asked:

"By the way, what *is* your age, Mr. McNiel? I've often wondered!"

Jim thrilled to that! Plainly, then, she *had* thought about him . . .!

"I'm just twenty-two!" he told her.

And she, feeling that he had to be kept in his place, somehow, exclaimed:

"Why, you're only a boy!"

But, instead of being annoyed, Jim only laughed:

"Age is a matter of experience, rather than years, Miss Pryce! And I've seen quite a lot, in my time . . .!" His voice had taken a more sombre note, and he hastened to lighten it again: "Anyway, might one ask how old *you* are?"

Half-laughing, half-serious, she drew her slender figure to its full height:

"I'm exactly seventeen—to-morrow, as a matter of fact!"

"Seventeen? Why, you're nothing but a school-girl!" Jimmy laughed at her, getting his revenge.

"What you said just now about experience applies to me also!" she reminded him. "I've been sailing with Daddy for over twelve months, now!"

"*Touché!*" laughed Jim—and then, with a faint sigh: "Anyway, it's an ideal age!"

"What is—seventeen? Oh, I don't think so! I'm just longing to be twenty-five!"

"That wouldn't make a bit of difference!" McNiel said, gravely. "You see, when I said it was an ideal age, I meant it was—just five years younger than my own!"

She had to hide her face again at that—and thereafter changed the subject, with some abruptness.

From this flash of conversation it will be seen how far these two had advanced in intimacy—and that in the space of just an hour or two! It would seem that Captain Royston's "stunt" for running his cargo was likely to be more dangerous than he had imagined when he conceived it!

In the meantime the Port Authorities had been aboard, and had departed—after a right royal entertainment at the hands of the "Captain," and a condescending nod, plus a Corona-Corona each, from the millionaire—thoroughly satisfied that the yacht was the most innocent vessel in the world, and, indeed, likely to be a definite acquisition to the gaiety of the Capital City of Uruguay!

When the First Officer returned from his mission, it was soon apparent that that, also, had been thoroughly successful, and the "millionaire" issued immediate orders to his "party" that they were to get into the evening-kit with which they had been thoughtfully provided:

"Tuxedos—not 'claw-hammers'!" was the order. "You'll need those for the Big Scene, to-morrow night!"

And so, in due course, the party assembled on deck and made their way down the accommodation-ladder into the big motor-launch that was waiting for them. Carol was very interested to note how

handsome Jimmy McNiel looked in his "glad rags"—but not half so interested as he was in the slender, graceful figure, closely wrapped in the evening cloak of silk and fur!

As the launch thrummed its way towards the shore, Jim was suddenly conscious that something was staring hard at him. He turned round, to meet the eyes of Nippo, who happened to be one of the crew of the launch.

Nippo was eyeing him with a grim, anticipatory expression on his sharp-featured little face, and Jim, reading his thoughts, grinned aggravatingly at him. Nippo replied with a furtive but emphatic gesture—one dear to the hearts of London taxi-drivers and fish-porters. McNiel's grin became intensified!

The evening was a brilliant one, and in every way a success. Royston had done the thing in style. He had reserved the ball-room and adjacent lounges at the best hotel in the city, had had cocktail bars and buffets rigged up, and generally made preparations to entertain his guests in the most lavish manner. They, on their part, were only too ready to respond. Very soon both ball-room and lounges were crowded with a scintillating collection of men and women in glittering uniforms and wonderful gowns. The South Americans are called, from time to time, rather hard names, and sometimes they are regarded as a joke. But two things about them cannot be denied—their women, while they last, are radiantly beautiful, and they certainly have the secret of colourful dressing.

To Jimmy McNiel, standing by the bar and absorbing a hair-raising cocktail in order to steady

his nerves (he had just been dancing with Carol) came the "millionaire," and paused by his side:

"Did you ever see anything more like the opening of a musical-comedy?" he asked, with a wave of his hand towards the multi-coloured throng in the ball-room.

"You're about right!" McNiel laughed. "Incidentally, they're full of music—and comedy—this mob. But—there are claws beneath the velvet, and the ginger-bread under the gilt is, occasionally, poisoned!"

Royston gave him a quick glance:

"Meaning?"

"Oh, nothing in particular! Except, perhaps, that it is a dangerous thing to under-rate one's opponents!"

"H'm! Thanks for the hint!" The tone was sarcastic, but the nod with which he favoured his "guest" as he turned away was by no means a disapproving one.

The dance ended. The crowd swept off the floor like the parting fragments of a kaleidoscope. Timson came over to the bar and called for a drink.

"Wal," he commented, to McNiel. "I guess this beats the band, good *and* plenty! Say, I'm not too sure what the game is, but I will say the old man is giving us a dandy time, sure enough!"

"It certainly is a bit of a change after the fo'c'sle!" McNiel agreed, with a smile.

A moment later O'Leary joined them. There was a beatific expression in his eyes, and his gait was not entirely steady.

"Faith, but 'tis a broth of a boy—our host!" he grinned. "And, by the only sarpint that ever escaped from Saint Pathrick, what colleens they are! There's a little, dark-eyed thing I've been dancing with . . . and och! 'tis a jewel she is, entirely!"

He paused for a moment, and surveyed the others with semi-sober gravity.

Timson grinned at him, then caught sight of a tall, slender *señorita* in black satin, and a wonderful lace mantilla, and hurried away. O'Leary followed him with his eyes, and then turned back to McNiel:

"And phwat's the matter with you, ye poor gossoon?" he demanded. "Phwastin' your time standing here, like a blighted wallflower phwen there's all these beautiful little darlin's going spare! You phwant to phwake yourself up, my lad, that's what it is!"

"Thanks!" retorted McNiel, a little stiffly. "I'm quite happy—and minding my own business very nicely, too!"

The Irishman looked truculent for a moment:

"So! 'Tis getting on the high horse ye'd be afther, eh?" He paused for a moment, and then laughed, not altogether pleasantly: "Ah! I've got ye, now! 'Tis not the dear, dark little colleens ye'll be worryin' about, is it? You know a trick worth two of that, don't ye—an' nearer home, too!"

His eyes turned, with a knowing look, in the direction of Carol, who, slim and beautiful, was crossing the room on the arm of a young man in a uniform like the very coat of Joseph himself,

McNiel's eyes suddenly hardened, and the mouth went into a thin line. He put his hand, with apparent gentleness, on the Irishman's shoulder—but the grip of it made the big fellow wince and swear beneath his breath.

McNiel spoke, reverting to the language and accent of the fo'c'sle:

"If you don't keep your dirty trap shut, you lousy Irish hobo, I'll bust it for you!" he said, between his teeth.

"Oh, bad cess to ye, for an ill-tempered spalpeen, entirely!"

The Irishman shook himself free and lurched away, and McNiel, calling for another drink, kept his eyes glued on Carol, and envied the young soldier who was with her.

During the evening McNiel danced with her as much as he could—but that was not very often, because it was part of her business to devote herself mainly to her father's guests-of-the-evening. Nevertheless, he managed to get in one or two, and then, at the latter end of the proceedings (in the neighbourhood of two in the morning) an unexpected stroke of luck fell right into his lap.

He suddenly felt a sharp touch on the shoulder, and turned to find Royston himself at his elbow.

"Listen, McNiel. I've got to talk to some of these local bigwigs for a little while. Just keep your eye on my daughter for me, will you? Some of these ice-cream soldiers are getting oiled—and I wouldn't trust one of 'em as far as I could throw him!"

"Sure, sir—I'll look after her!"

"Good boy! Better get her to dance with you, if she will!"

The Old Man was not uninfluenced by alcohol himself, and unusually genial.

McNiel smiled, not without slyness:

"I'll ask her and see, anyway, sir!" he said—and went off on his happy—and by no means uncertain—errand.

A few moments later he was in the seventh heaven once more—dancing her slowly and smoothly across the polished floor to the strains of a sensuous Southern waltz.

"You dance beautifully, you know, Mr. McNiel!" she murmured in his ear.

"And you. You dance like a fairy on the edge of a golden cloud!"

They danced in silence for a while—and then he said something under his breath. In response to her query as to what he had said he answered:

"I won't repeat it! Your father very kindly trusted me—*me*, mark you—to look after you!"

She raised her eyes to his for a flash, then looked away:

"Whatever do you mean?"

"You know what I mean well enough!" he answered, with harsh bluntness. And then she murmured:

"Yes! Perhaps I do!"

His clasp suddenly tightened about her, drawing her quite closely into his arms, and his voice became tense as he whispered:

"And—you don't mind . . .?"

"Perhaps I—don't! But, *please* . . .!"

His arm loosened instantly, and he heaved a long sigh:

"By God! I don't care if I die to-morrow!" he exclaimed.

She gave a little, tantalizing laugh, and said:

"Oh, I'd rather you didn't do that!"

"Then I'll live for ever!"

Oh, decidedly, Cap'n Royston, there are more dangers than you reckoned on attached to this *coup* of yours!

CHAPTER III

THE GUNS ARE RUN!

ON the way back the night was like blue-velvet, spangled with pin-points of gold. Jim tried to get next to Carol in the launch, but her father claimed her, and, cursing silently, he had to give way to him.

As the launch chugged through the almost flat, dark-blue water, certain sounds fell upon his ears, which presently resolved themselves into a monologue, delivered very softly, and in a pronounced Cockney accent:

"O, wot a pal! *Ain't* 'e a pal? Not 'arf 'e ain't! Goes an' disappears, wivout a word to 'is ole chum, so 'e does! Goes in fur a spell of —O, Lor', wot's the ruddy name? Somefink abaht flowers it is—O, I know—re-incarnation—that's wot 'e does! Grows into a bloomin' toff, all in five minutes—an' then 'e goes an' fergits all 'is pals! Lost in the lap o' luxury—that's wot 'e is! Lost in a bloomin' maze of oysters, an' cav-i-ar, an' red, sparklin' wine—while 'is pore ole mate, 'e 'as to sit an' shiver in a ruddy little motor-boat, wivout a drink in 'is innards, or a bloomin' Woodbine between 'is perishin' lips. . . !"

It was Nippo, standing close to McNiell on the bow, and staring out towards the *Clytie's* lights as he spoke his "thoughts" aloud.

Jim stifled a laugh, and reached into his pockets. Then he leaned closer to the small, upright figure:

"You're a damned old liar, anyhow, Nippo!" he whispered. "Here grab these—and then say I'd forgotten you, you blue-nosed, Billingsgate bum, you!"

A flask and a packet—the latter containing sandwiches and cigarettes, changed hands, after which Nippo abandoned his melancholy monologue for a little song, which ran:

"Dear ole pals—jolly ole pals . . . !"

Down in the saloon Royston gave his three guests a truculent glare, and snarled:

"Now, turn in, you three roustabouts! And if you've got anything to sleep off, sleep it off good and plenty. To-morrow's the Big Show! And that applies especially to that drunken Irish bum! Now, get to it!"

The three went, the other two supporting O'Leary, who was as drunk as a lord. None of them had the chance to say good night to Carol, but she exchanged a swift glance with Jim McNiel which caused him to sleep as on a bed of rose leaves!

The following day was a busy one for the crew, and our three young friends congratulated themselves most heartily on their temporary change of status!

All the morning boatloads of stuff were coming off from the shore. Food-stuffs galore; great rolls of gaily coloured awnings and bunting; huge palms and other greenery in tubs and barrels; crates of coloured bulbs, with an attendant horde of dark-skinned mechanics to see to them.

And once more, amid the hoarse adjurations of

the bo'sun and his mate—to say nothing of the First and Second Officers, and the quartermaster—and the muttered obscenities of the labouring crew, the *Clytie* was once more transformed in appearance.

She looked now like a show-boat, or a floating garden party. Right along the deck awnings were rigged, and (ingeniously) the whole of the port side was screened with canvas, lavishly decorated with festoons of greenery and richly coloured tropical flowers. Great care was taken—and Royston himself supervised this—to render it impossible for anyone to get within a yard or so of this screen, by placing a dense row of huge palms right along the length of the deck, at the foot of it. The reason being that this obstruction of the view from the seaward side of the ship was of the utmost importance in Captain Royston's plans.

Royston himself was busy aboard for quite a large part of the day. Nevertheless, he found time to make a couple of trips ashore, and he saw to it that his daughter and the three "guests" spent most of the day there. This suited Jimmy McNiel well enough—for, while the other two drank and amused themselves in various ways, he was able to devote himself to Carol.

But already, as the day drew on, there loomed in his mind, like a spectre at a feast, the thought of to-morrow, when he would have to go back to the fo'c'sle—the scrubbers and the buckets, the holystone and the tar-brush—and eating one's food out of a tin pannikin filled from a greasy pail. . . ! But, worst of all, to have to stand supinely on the foredeck and watch Carol on the bridge, or aft. . . !

He cursed himself for an ingrate, and told himself that it might be much worse—he might not be able to see her at all! But that was not, after all, very much comfort!

However, there was still the evening to go through—and, perhaps, the early part of tomorrow—before and just after they put to sea once more. . . !

At last it was time to get back to the ship and change for the evening. Full evening-dress this time, too.

Before the first of the guests arrived the Old Man was dashing around, a dynamic unit of sweating energy, making his final preparations, and issuing his last orders. At the last minute he took his three "guests" into his confidence.

His plan was an ingenious one—and this was it. Every inch of shore was guarded; every foot of sea patrolled, for it was well known to the authorities that the notorious Captain Royston was going to attempt to run a cargo of arms to the revolutionaries which would enable them to make their long-planned attack upon the Government.

But the business of the City had to be carried on, and no trouble was taken to examine the small craft that went backwards and forwards—so long as no strange or suspicious vessel was seen anywhere near the coast.

Now, after what had happened, no one could regard the *Clytie* as either a strange or a suspicious vessel! So that Royston's plan was as clever as it was daring—for he had arranged that, while the great executive authorities of the Republic were being lavishly entertained aboard her; while the

searchlights of the forts were playing on her—his cargo of rifles and machine-guns, neatly packed in dummy piano-cases, would be trans-shipped through a mid-deck port to the boats that would, one by one, come drifting idly down for them. This would all be done, of course, from the seaward side, screened from the glare of the searchlights and possible observation either from those ashore or aboard, by the canvas screen which had been erected!

The hour duly arrived, and the *Clytie's* boats, decorated with bunting as if for a *festa*, put off for the shore and began to bring the guests aboard, where they were received by the "millionaire," his daughter, and his "party." The jollification was strictly to the deck-level, and men were specially—and unobtrusively—posted everywhere to see to it that none of the visitors went below, or up on to the bridge—from either of which vantage points they might have got some idea of what was going on.

Dinner over, tables were cleared like lightning by a specially engaged shore-staff, and the real business of the evening began—both above and below decks!

The first dance was led off, in ceremonial style, by Carol dancing with one of the principal Ministers of the Republic, and the "millionaire" with his lady wife. The three young men of the "party" had each been assigned to a *señora* or *señorita* of importance. Mc Niel held in his arms a slender, darkly scintillating beauty, who fed him on languishing glances from limpid eyes as dark as night, but considerably brighter—and he was bored to tears.

Things were not going too well with Mc Niel. He had pleaded for one dance with Carol, and she, very plainly not unwilling, had promised him one if possible. But in the meantime, her father had given him and the others special instructions to watch out for any guests who might be inclined to get suspicious or dangerously curious—and this duty was likely to occupy overmuch of the time which was, on this last night of his temporary elevation to the “afterguard,” so infinitely precious to him.

And so, while musicians blared; feet tapped and scraped upon the deck; silken skirts *swished*; glasses clinked and gay laughter floated out upon the star-lit air from the deck, down below the crew, with the exception of those told off for “police-duty,” were toiling like frantic, blasphemous, sweating slaves, getting the heavy cases, as silently as might be, overside into the boats that drifted down to receive them.

The plan seemed to be a water-tight one. The canvas screen and the bulk of the vessel shielded the proceedings from the searchlights which, in compliment, played upon the vessel from the shore, and the orchestra’s loud music effectually drowned any noise that might be made in the trans-shipping process.

And so it was that the whole thing might have gone through without a hitch, had it not been for the fact that Señor Ramira, a high official of the Government, had the mind of a rather acute policeman!

In fact Señor Ramira, in his way, was not such a bad imitation of Sherlock Holmes, adding to the

famous deductive powers of that celebrated sleuth the quality of being suspicious of everything—including, sometimes, himself!

On this occasion the mental processes of Señor Ramira became somewhat sharpened by the alcohol he had consumed—so also did his suspicious faculties!

The evening was not very far advanced before Señor Ramira commenced to ask himself questions!

Why, Señor Ramira asked silently of Señor Ramira, should their ultra-hospitable host *be* so ultra-hospitable? Why should he, putting in such a brief stay as he, apparently, was—entertain on such a comprehensive and lavish scale?

It might be, of course, that he had some iron in the fire—some commercial proposition to exploit, or some concession that he needed. Or, on the other hand it might be that he desired to get all the important people together on his ship so that they should not get into mischief elsewhere . . . ?

Again—why the erection of that elaborately decorated canvas screen? Certainly, it was very handsome—but, on the other hand, it cut out all view of the star-lit ocean, which would also have been very beautiful, and very romantic!

It might, possibly, have been erected to shelter the guests from the chill night breeze blowing off the sea—or, *again, it might have been put up to prevent people seeing what was happening on the seaward side . . . ?*

The third problem that Señor Ramira put to Señor Ramira on that occasion was a very pertinent one indeed. To have two orchestras playing, so

that when one stopped the other started, thus making the dancing of the non-stop variety, was, he gathered, one of the latest fads of New York and the great cities of the West. That this millionaire should engage two orchestras was, then, not surprising. But what *was* curious was that, while everything else had been done on the best scale, the two orchestras engaged for the evening were not two of the best orchestras obtainable. On the other hand, however, they *were* two of the largest, and two of the noisiest . . .! Could this possibly mean that their real business was not to amuse or please the guests, *but to prevent them hearing what was going on elsewhere aboard that vessel, or in her vicinity?*

You will see, from this, the type of mind that Señor Ramira possessed!

He summed up. Here was a curious juxtaposition. A gathering of the high-lights of Montevideo, all together in one comparatively small and confined space. A canvas screen to prevent them seeing what was happening on one side of them! Two very loud orchestras, constantly playing, to prevent them from hearing . . .!

Señor Ramira decided to investigate!

He went and found his host, and complimented him upon the lavishness of his entertainment, and the beautiful decorations upon his lovely yacht. His host appeared pleased.

"Ah, Señor," went on the cunning Señor Ramira, "and what a beautiful vessel she appears to be! Now, I am very interested in ships—and especially in yachts. How I would love if I could have a look over the yacht—just wander about a

little by myself, and look at things? Would that be at all possible, Señor Pryce?"

The Señor Pryce exhibited just the faintest touch of consternation, hastily repressed—but not hastily enough to escape the eagle eye of the cunning Señor Ramira.

Then the millionaire answered, in his bluff, hearty, English manner:

"Why, Señor, you honour me, and my poor vessel! I should be delighted for you to see it all, from truck to keelson, as sailors say! But to-night, of course, I cannot leave my other guests! And I am proud of my yacht, Señor, and should hate not to be able to show her to you in person! If you could come out to-morrow morning, now . . .!"

Señor Ramira smiled, bowed, and said he quite understood, and he would be delighted. Then he strolled away.

Royston hastily collared McNiel, who happened to be near.

"Hey, you—McNiel! See that feller Ramira—that long chap there, who looks like a snake! Get on his tail and watch him—I'm pretty sure he smells a rat! Let me know at once if anything happens!"

"Very good, sir!"

And McNiel went off on his unwelcome job—doubly unwelcome in that he had been hoping to get that dance with Carol at any minute!

"The Old Man's getting nervy!" was his mental comment—but he soon discovered that, if this was so, the nervousness was not without reason.

He kept Ramira in sight, and soon found that he was gently edging himself out of the limelight

as much as possible. Also there was a furtive air about him which was more than a little suspicious.

Presently he paused to look up at the bridge. The dark figure of one of the officers was silhouetted against the sky up there, and he seemed to be quite careless and unconcerned.

Nevertheless, Señor Ramira made a sudden move in the direction of the port bridge-ladder, and essayed to mount it!

But instantly, from out of the shadow there came a voice:

“‘Arf a mo, guv’nor—where are you orf to?”

Nippo stepped forward, and interposed between the ladder and the advancing form of Señor Ramira. Señor Ramira tried to suggest that he had the permission of the Señor Pryce to go up on the bridge. Nippo explained that orders were clear—no one to be allowed on the bridge! As one spoke Spanish and the other English, and neither of them understood the other’s language, the argument was a trifle abortive. Except that Nippo made it quite clear he was not allowing Ramira on to the bridge—and Ramira’s suspicions instantly increased by one hundred per cent.

McNiel, understanding both languages, heard both sides of the argument, and instantly realized that Ramira was a real danger. He stepped into the colloquy, and explained to Ramira that, aboard British yachts, it was against all the rules to allow passengers or guests to go on to the bridge.

Ramira was annoyed. He knew that from the bridge he could have seen almost all there was to see—at any rate enough to either disarm or confirm his now very acute suspicions!

It was then that he made his very fatal mistake! It was in his mind to go back to the dance-floor, and to take some of his colleagues into his confidence. But he was one of those men who love to steal a march on others. He wanted to be the one and only man to find out what all this was about, and to denounce it, in fine dramatic style, if it was to the detriment of the Republic!

So he abandoned that idea, and explained politely to McNiel that he had the permission—the special permission—of Señor Pryce to go up there.

McNiel, a trifle puzzled as to what to do, saw his chance and jumped at it:

“Why, in that case, I will go to Señor Pryce, and get him to come along himself and satisfy this fellow—who is, I would explain, only obeying orders!”

“That will be most obliging of you!” smiled Ramira, who was, apparently, as anxious for McNiel to go as McNiel was himself.

Turning to Nippo, the latter spoke—in English:

“Follow this bird, Nippo—and if he shows the least sign of getting funny—out him! If anyone sees him, say he’s fainted! I’ll be back in no time!”

“Righto, cocky!” answered Nippo, genially, and McNiel hurried off.

He found Royston, drew him to one side, and said, hastily:

“That fellow suspects something, all right! He’s tried hard to get up on to the bridge, already. Said you gave him permission. I’ve left one of the men tailing him, while I came to fetch you!”

“Good lad!” exclaimed Royston. “Come on—we’ll settle him!” he added, grimly.

He excused himself to the people he was talking to, and hurried off with McNiel. Just forward of the bridge they encountered Nippo, who was smiling broadly:

"I had to do it, sir!" he explained to Royston.

"Do what?" snapped Royston—McNiel had not explained.

"Knock 'im aht, o' course! 'E got funny all right, 'e did! Not 'arf he didn't!"

Nippo went on to explain that Ramira had tried to go down the companion, found it locked, and had then walked along the canvas screen until he had found a secluded spot where he could get at the screen through the imported "shrubby." He had then whipped out a knife, and tried to cut a hole in the canvas:

"So," Nippo concluded, "I just dotted 'im one be'ind the ear-ole, an' put 'im to sleep!"

"Good!" snapped Royston, between his clenched teeth. "Take me to him, and look slippy!"

They found the unconscious form of Ramira, out of sight behind the row of ornamental palms.

Royston, looking down at his prostrate form, broke into a soft stream of horrible blasphemies. Then he said to Nippo:

"Give me a belaying-pin—quick!"

Nippo stared—but there was that in Royston's voice that brooked no hesitation. Nippo fetched the belaying-pin—a short, heavy affair of iron.

Royston took it, and bent over the prostrate man. With his left hand he took a grip of his collar, pulling his head and shoulders clear of the deck. The head wobbled grotesquely as he did so. Then, before either of the other two realized what

he was going to do, he lifted the heavy belaying-pin in his right hand, and struck, hard and viciously, at the drooping head!

McNiel gave a sharp gasp of horror. Under the impact of the blow the head jerked, with a horrid semblance of life. Again the gun-runner struck, and this time there was a horrid crunching of broken bone as the blow fell! Blood, thick and dark, was blotting out the side of the South American's face, and dripping onto the deck. A third blow, and something pinky-white, streaked with red, protruded from the side of the crushed skull.

Royston let the limp, battered head drop to the deck, and turned on Nippo, whose face had gone deadlily-white, and whose eyes were goggling with horror:

"Slip along and get Henry, Jakins and Costigan. Smartly, now!" he ordered, in a curt, toneless voice.

McNiel was staring, silent and a little sick with sheer disgust and horror. He had seen men done to death violently before in his time, but never in such a cold-blooded and brutal manner as this. He suppressed, with an effort, a desire to spring at Royston and strangle the life out of him.

"One of those baskets over here—and look slippery! Don't stand there looking like a sick rabbit!"

Royston's voice rasped on his ear, and he turned almost mechanically and obeyed. The baskets indicated were large ones, something like actors' touring baskets, only a trifle longer and shallower. They had been used to bring bottles of wine aboard,

and were now stacked in this secluded spot out of the way.

As McNiel fetched the basket one orchestra finished, and the other immediately struck up "*When I leave the World Behind*"—a popular music-hall ballad of the day, set to waltz time. The irony of it made McNiel shudder—almost.

He brought the basket back, and Royston, opening it, commenced to lift the corpse into it, using care not to get blood on his hands or clothes.

"Some of those over there have got empty bottles in. Bring me some of the bottles!" Again McNiel obeyed, and Royston arranged the empty bottles on top of the corpse he had by now put in the basket, and over which he had spread some straw-packing which had been in the bottom of it.

He slammed down the lid and fastened it by its two straps as Nippo returned, bringing the three men with him.

"Costigan, you're in charge of this job!" Royston's voice was just his usual hard, unemotional one, and perfectly steady—at which McNiel marvelled. "One of these Dagoes has been getting nosey, and he's been put to sleep. You three are taking this basket ashore in one of the boats. If anyone questions you, you're going for some more wine—but take care that no one looks inside the basket, that's all! Carry the basket ashore—find a quiet street or alley, there are plenty of 'em about, and then dump the stiff, and take the basket back to the boat as *though it was full*! Have you got that?"

Costigan—a big, hefty ruffian, with a scarred face, touched his forelock:

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Right! Then get to it—*pronto!*"

Costigan made a gesture, and the other two men picked the basket up, and walked away with it, Costigan following. Royston turned to Nippo and McNiel, and gave them a quick, searching glance. Then, with his lips drawn back in an ugly snarl, he said:

"And you two had better forget what you've seen! Breathe a single word about it, and I'll drill you as full of bullet-holes as a colander! Now, get back to your jobs!"

The two exchanged one look, pregnant with meaning, and then walked away—Nippo to guard the bridge-ladder, McNiel to join the dance. And as he went a sort of refrain was humming through his head: "*This cold-blooded murderer is the father of the girl I want to marry!*"

It was the first time he had admitted, even to himself, just what his intentions were in regard to Carol, but he didn't notice that!

He was terribly shocked by what had happened. The whole thing had been done in such an utterly cold-blooded and inhuman manner! If Royston had killed Ramira in fair fight, or even shot him as he stood before him, that would not have seemed so bad—but to pick a senseless man up from the deck and casually batter his brains out . . . ! The sound of that crunching bone was still in McNiel's ears; the sight of those protruding brains still before his eyes, as he joined the laughing, sparkling throng on the dance-floor.

Carol had missed him, and had wondered where he had gone. When she saw him she made a signal, and he crossed to her.

"You can have this dance, if you like!" she said to him.

Without a word he held out his arm, and, in another moment, they were dancing. But McNiel was very silent, and, after a little while, she noticed how white his face was.

"What's wrong?" she asked him. "You're not ill, are you?"

"Oh, no!" he answered. "There's nothing wrong with me, so far as I know!"

But he never spoke again after that, and when he handed her over to her next partner at the conclusion of the dance she felt both puzzled and hurt.

When the party was over, and the guests were leaving as fast as the boats could put them ashore, McNiel heard someone inquiring for Ramira. And he heard Royston say:

"Oh, he went sometime ago! He bade me farewell, and said he had some important private business to attend to ashore!"

"Private business, eh?" The inquirer laughed meaningly. "*Very* private, I should say!"

"Yes, I gathered as much!" answered Royston, drily.

Long before the first batch of guests left the *Clytie* her real business was completed. The last case of arms had been transferred, and the last boat had drifted away into the darkness.

The *coup* had been brought off! And in a dark alley in the slum-quarter of the City, with his eyes

closed as though in sleep, the body of Señor Ramira, the inquisitive, lay stiff and silent in the gutter.

Very early the following morning the *Clytie* hoisted her anchors, and steamed rapidly away into the blue—and, an hour after she sailed, O'Leary, Timson and McNiel were back in the fo'c'sle once more!

Before he returned to his former status on board—after breakfast in the saloon—Jim had a word or two with Carol.

"There *was* something wrong with you last night!" she asserted, in a rather accusatory tone—not mentioning, however, that the incident had caused her to lie awake for most of the night! "What was it?"

His face hardened:

"Oh, nothing, really!" he told her. "I saw something that upset me, that's all!"

"Oh!" There was relief in her tone. "It was nothing to do with me, then?"

And he answered, lying bravely:

"Nothing whatever! And then, waxing bold, he added: "Would you have minded if it had been?"

It was right at this point that Carol Royston surprised Jim McNiel. He had expected the usual sort of thing—a blush, and a little laugh—a fencing-phrase, or, possibly, a cold negative. Instead she raised her eyes to his, and, looking at him quite steadily, for all that a slight flush stained the smoothness of her cheeks, she answered, with direct simplicity:

"Yes! I think I should!"

Jimmy McNiel was more than startled. He abruptly turned his face away, and, with hands and teeth tightly clenched, strove fiercely with a

sudden temptation which assailed him. In the end he neither lost nor won—he temporized.

He turned suddenly on the girl:

“Look here, Miss Royston—this may be the last opportunity I shall have of speaking to you for a very long time—maybe for always. Will you mind—will you think me impossibly presumptuous—if I am very frank indeed?”

And she replied, in the same steady voice:

“I *like* frankness, Mr. McNiel!”

“Then, listen. This has been a strange little interlude, this last day or so, between you and me. Strange and unexpected. But before it happened—before I ever dreamed such a thing *could* happen—I was . . . how shall I put it . . .? I was taking a great interest in you! And, from something you said once, I have reason to believe (please don’t think me a conceited idiot!) that you had—noticed—me! Miss Royston, please believe me to be absolutely sincere when I tell you that there are a lot of things I would like to say to you—but I feel that our acquaintance has been too short for what I should have to say to appear really sincere, or to convince *you*! But I felt I should like you to understand how I feel—and the rest . . . well, we must leave it to Fate, I suppose!”

She kept her steady eyes on him. The flush on her cheeks deepened a little, as she answered:

“I’m not sure I like people who leave things to Fate! I have a fancy for men who know what they want—and go and get it!”

His turn to flush, now!

“And I’d do that!” he retorted, quickly. “But

I haven't only myself to think of—I don't want to make things uncomfortable for you, you see!"

"I see!" her voice was very soft now. "But——!"

He interrupted her:

"Don't forget," he put in, quietly. "I am only a foremast hand aboard this ship. And—I don't think your father would approve of you being—friendly—with a common sailor!"

She smiled a little, but did not attempt to argue against his description of himself. Instead, she replied:

"I have my own views on a child's duty to its parent. I think that, up to a certain point, and beyond another, a child's life is its own—to be made or marred at its own will. All the same, there is no reason in causing unnecessary pain or bother. After one bell in the first night-watch Dad is usually busy, and after that he likes a rest. Sometimes I have a bit of a breather on deck, and—the second mate is a friend of mine . . .!"

McNiel noticed that the only sign of embarrassment she displayed during this speech was when she spoke of her father, and his heart went out in sympathy to her. For everyone on board knew that it was Royston's habit to get dead drunk in his cabin every evening at that time—unless there was business on hand. Nevertheless, his heart leapt with joy at the purport of her speech—for he was in the second mate's watch, and obviously she meant to convey that whenever the second's watch were on duty at that hour, he would stand a chance of seeing and talking to her . . . !

As for Carol, she gave him a quick, rather shy little smile, and left him.

Ten minutes later the three "guests" made their last appearance as such—in Royston's cabin. He gave them a sour look, and announced, curtly:

"Well, my lads, the job's done, and all's well! The rebels have got their guns, and I've shown those fools at B.A. that what I *say* I do, I'll *do*! As I promised, there'll be an extra twenty dollars for each of you when we pay off—and you can draw some of it at the next port of call if you like! Now, you can get back for'ard, and remember this—if any of you take the slightest advantage of what's happened, or give yourselves airs about it, look out for squalls! That's all—get for'ard!"

They went, but, as he reached the door, Royston called Jim back:

"Shut that door!" was his first command.

Jim obeyed.

"Now," said the Captain. "Dead men tell no tales—and live ones do well to follow their example! Keep your mouth shut, and you won't lose by it—open it, and I'll see it won't be open for long! I'm a good friend—and a damned bad enemy, McNiel—and here's proof of part of that statement!"

He held out a 25-dollar note.

McNiel, standing stiffly, looked at it for a moment. Then he raised his eyes slowly to the skipper's face. Inwardly he was boiling. He wanted to tell Royston that he was a dirty murderer—but he was thinking of Carol and the future, and so restrained himself. But his voice, when he spoke, cut like a knife:

"I don't want any hush-money!" he said. "I take my pay from you, and that's enough!"

Royston sneered nastily:

"Some hell of an English gentleman, aren't you? All right, my bucko—get forward, then—and don't forget what I've said! By the way, you and the others can keep those duds I got for you—they might be useful ashore, sometime!"

McNiel, who had reached the door, swung round on him:

"And I don't want your cast-off clothes, either!" he snapped, and went out.

But in the cabin he thought better of it. He had no decent shore clothes, and there might be a chance of meeting Carol sometime! So he gave the others the Captain's message—and contented himself with discarding only the evening kit! He smiled at himself as he did this, and thought:

"My God! What damn funny things love makes a fellow do!"

The three duly went for'ard, and, for a few days, endured the concentrated chaff of their messmates. Then the affair was forgotten, as other interests cropped up.

Life on the *Induna*—she had resumed her old name and appearance as soon as the spires and chimneys of Montevideo had dropped below the skyline—went on in much the same old way. There is a popular idea that life on a gun-running vessel is tremendously exciting—a sort of pirate's life in miniature. Actually, though there are, of course, moments and spasms of excitement, the life aboard a gun-runner is just about as monotonous as it is on any other sort of cargo boat.

They ran some guns up the China coast—some more to one of the Islands. One or two of the

smaller republics on the South American coast also had consignments. They had one running fight with an antediluvian "war-ship," and got the better of it.

McNiel, who craved always action and excitement—and the bigger the risk the better—was disappointed with the life. He would have left the fo'c'sle of the *Induna* in a very short time had it not been for Carol. But he could not leave her, for he was madly in love with her as any young fellow of his age well could be!

She had kept her word, and every night the second mate's watch was on deck at the appointed time, she managed at least a half-hour—and often a good deal longer—for the eager Jimmy.

On the first occasion—the second night after he had reverted back to the fo'c'sle, after the watch had been on duty for fifteen minutes or so, the Second had called him to the bridge:

"Oh, McNiel—just lay aft, and keep an eye on the sea over the starboard quarter, will you?" He shot a quick glance at Jim, and grinned. Jim flushed. "Tell me if you see anything that strikes you as peculiar!" the mate went on, with a twinkle in his eye—and then added, more gravely: "Better keep your weather-eye elsewhere than the sea, as well, you know!"

Jim took his meaning, and was grateful:

"Aye, aye, sir—and thank you!" he responded, and went off aft with his heart beating high and furiously. And five minutes later, clad all in soft black, and looking like a spirit of the night, Carol had joined him.

They had many long talks, and on many subjects.

Not always of themselves. But Jim, who had a sense of honour all his own, was careful that she should learn the real story of his life. How his father was a rich man, and how he had been brought up public-school, and all the rest of it. How he had started life brightly enough, and then, out of the blue, disgrace and ruin had come! He was 18 then—it was four years back—and he had just walked out of his parent's home, out of the town, and, soon afterwards, out of the country!

Since then he had sold newspapers in New York, hoboed up and down the country, sailed on two or three coasting vessels, served in the army of a South American republic, and fought through three of their funny little—but rather bloodthirsty—revolutions. And finally, he had shipped aboard the *Induna*.

"About that trouble," he said, quietly. "I'm going to tell you the truth, and you'll be the first person who's heard it from me, and the third in the world who knows it. I'm going to tell you, because I think it is right you should know—and also because I think it is only fair to *me* that you should. The trouble wasn't mine—it was my brother's. But I shouldered it—not for any quixotic reason, but because my mother is an invalid, and Tom is the apple of her eye. He's a good chap, too. He hated that I should shoulder the blame, but it had to be—for the mater's sake. *His* disgrace would have killed her—mine didn't matter so much!"

She had laughed—but it was a very soft laugh indeed!

"Well," she said. "We all have our own ideas of what constitutes Quixotism, haven't we?"

"In this case it wasn't Quixotism at all!" he was a little heated. "It was just a sense of duty—of doing the right thing! Selfishness, really, because I'd never have felt comfortable if I hadn't done it!"

"Then I think you did right!" she agreed, gently. "But it wasn't selfishness. You were just true to yourself, that's all—and one must always be that!"

"Quite!" said Jim. And then: "I say, look at that star! Isn't it a beauty . . .!"

Not always did they talk of themselves. Often they discussed more abstract subjects, young though they were. Carol had a queer streak of philosophical wisdom, which Jim loved. Some of the things she said stuck tight in his mind.

For instance, once when they were discussing bravery:

"I think," she said, "that bravery is the greatest virtue, as cowardice is the greatest sin. And not only the greatest—*it is the only sin!* For every wrong that a man does he does from some sort of a sense of fear—because he is frightened of something. A man is dishonest, or hard on his workers—because he is afraid of poverty himself. A man lies—because he is afraid of the consequences of the truth. He murders—because he is frightened of the person he kills! And so on. You can take it for a fact that the only *real* sin in the world is to be afraid!"

"I'm afraid it's the commonest, too!" Jim had put in.

"I'm afraid it is!" she agreed. And then she made his heart leap and his head whirl, by looking at him and saying, in that queer, frank manner of

hers: "That's why I like you—you are not afraid of anything!"

He laughed, and flushed a little self-consciously:

"How do you know that?"

"I can't tell you—I just *know*, that's all!"

Of course, it was not long before the inevitable happened. The after-deck of a lonely ship, ploughing her way through phosphorescent seas, under a star-studded sky of dark-blue velvet—and sometimes with a moon turning the whole scene to a sort of heavenly vision, would breed romance in anyone—and certainly could not fail to do so in the hearts of two adventurous young people! The night came when suddenly he took her in his arms.

Later, when the first wonder of mutually-discovered love was waning, they faced the situation bravely, and made their plans.

Jim was to leave the ship at the next port, and go to New York. There he was to find some sort of a job—something that had some money attached to it, or might lead to somewhere. And then, as soon as ever he had enough to make just the tiniest and most precarious nest for her, she would come to him.

"But—your father will never let you!" Jim pointed out. "I'm dead certain he has other plans for you. Wants to marry you to a millionaire, or something—and, by God, you're worth it, too!"

She smiled at him:

"Don't insult me! I don't think I've got a superiority-complex, but I would hate to marry a millionaire, even if he were the last man left on earth! And, as for my father—well, his ideas

are not always *my* ideas! I love him very dearly, and I don't want to hurt him—but I must shape my life for myself. Not to do so would be wrong, in my opinion! Go and get ready for me quickly—and as soon as I hear from you I'll come to you!"

"Darling. . . !" he whispered, and took her in his arms again.

It was not long after that that the other inevitable thing happened.

Something—some intercepted glance during the day, when they happened to get near to each other, as they sometimes did; or, possibly, some hint dropped accidentally by Carol—made Royston suspicious. And so there came an evening when, although he retired to his cabin as usual, Royston left the whisky bottle alone!

Half-an-hour later a kiss was rudely interrupted!

Jim suddenly felt a grip on his shoulder—a grip that felt like that of a steel vice, and that suddenly jerked him back and swung him round. Then, for an instant, he looked into the face of Captain Royston—a face white and distorted by rage, with eyes narrowed, and the tight lips drawn back to show the teeth in a dog-like snarl.

Next moment the world seemed to leap right at him, as Royston's big fist came smashing into his face, and the dark skies melted into a thousand blazing lights.

Carol stifled a scream, and then stood watching, quiet and tense, except that her small hands twisted and clung to each other, in the excess of her pent-up emotion.

McNiel lay, silent, in the scuppers for a moment

or so. Then with a suddenness that made the skipper clench his fists and drop into an attitude of defence, he sprang to his feet again.

He stepped straight up to Royston and thrust his face right up close to the skipper's. His eyes were blazing, and his mouth was drawn to a thin, straight line:

"Listen, Royston!" he said, through his clenched teeth, "I've got to take that blow, because I love your daughter, and you're her father! But you're not frightening me, and don't think it! I'm not afraid of you, or your fists, or . . . !"

Again that iron fist took him under the jaw, and again he went into the scuppers! And yet again he rose, and thrust his bleeding face close into the other's, as he said, in a voice too low for Carol to hear:

"That was a cowardly blow, Royston! But it isn't the first time I've seen you do a coward's trick, as you know!" Then, in a louder voice: "You can go on till you kill me, if you like, you cowardly dog! But I shan't hit back—though I'm not afraid of you, or twenty like you!"

Once again the skipper's arm came back, and Carol gave a little cry:

"Father!"

He swung on her in a fury:

"Get below," he snarled at her. "I'll deal with you later!"

But she answered him, steadily:

"Oh, no! I'll stay here, and watch you knock hell out of a man who you know won't hit you back! It's rather good for one's conceit to know one has a father like that, you know!"

Royston started, and then turned very pale. The anger left his face, too—and, for the first time, McNiel realized that Royston loved his daughter with a very real, and a very big, love. In that moment he felt sorry for him, for he knew what the ultimate end to the affair must necessarily be. As always, youth must win—and Royston, no longer young, would be a lonely man!

The gun-runner pulled himself together with an effort. He turned once more to McNiel, and now his face was devoid of anger. But it was bitter and sneering:

"Get back for'ard, you dockyard scum!" he snarled. "And remember, if you as much as show your sneaking nose aft of the bridge for the rest of this run, I'll wring your dirty neck for you! You snivelling, love-sick, lop-eared rabbit, you! And as soon as we touch port, don't forget, I'll boot you off the ship myself! Now—get!"

McNiel controlled himself with an effort:

"You can save yourself the bother!" he said, coolly. "I was going in any case!"

He turned on his heel and walked for'ard, wiping the blood from his face as he went.

The following day they ran into Rio—which was off their course. But before McNiel left, rather to his surprise, he had a short interview with Carol. It took place aft, with Royston a pace or two off, his face like a thunder-cloud, his hand thrust into the sidepocket of his pea-jacket and, as McNiel could see, feverishly handling the revolver he always carried there!

Not a too-comfortable interview! But they made their definite plans for communicating, and, when

he turned to go, Carol put her arms round his neck and kissed him before them all! It made McNiel very proud, and the little crowd of curious sailors on the fo'c'sle suddenly broke into a cheer.

"Silence, you scupper-rats!" Royston almost shrieked at them. "Or I'll drill holes in you!" And he waved the revolver in the air, threatening them with it.

As McNiel left the ship, the second mate had a word with him:

"Gang wary, my lad!" he whispered. "I'm telling you, after what's happened, your life isn't worth tuppence!"

"Thank you, sir!" Jim answered. "I'll be careful!"

"Do—you've a good excuse for it!" said the mate, with a rather regretful glance towards where Carol was standing.

As Jim, his sea-chest on his shoulder, walked along the quay, he suddenly became conscious of one following him, and keeping in step with him. The mate's warning in his mind, he whirled round—to find that it was none other than Nippo!

"What the devil d'you think you're doing?" he demanded eyeing the sea-chest which Nippo also carried on his shoulder.

"Itching me waggin to a star, o' course!" was the grinning reply. "Lead on, O Star of Eve—and mind the step as you go!"

"I always thought you were a bit of a fool, now I know it!" said Jim, but he was deeply touched by the little Cockney's loyalty.

The chums slept in a sailor's home that night, and the following morning news broke which

effectually squashed any dirty plans Royston might have had in regard to Jim's life. England had declared war on Germany—and, three days later, both Jim and Nippo, aided by the British Consul, were *en route* for the Old Country, to join up and fight for her!

Jim wrote to Carol: “. . . You once said cowardice is the greatest sin, and I cannot play the coward in my country's hour of need even for you, whom I love more than life itself. . . !”

CHAPTER IV

A SHELL-HOLE IN FLANDERS

THE action of H.E. shells, as anyone used to their vagaries will tell you, are as fickle and inconsistent as those of a woman.

The one in question had dug a neat hole, of the shape and dimensions of exactly half of a huge sphere, on the Allied side of No-Man's Land. The shell had come screaming down just after the German attack, and not one soul on either side had been hurt by it.

But while the Germans were being beaten back one or two victims fell on its edge, and rolled down its sides, and one poor devil, with the instinct of the hurt animal, had painfully crawled into it, shrieking in agony as he rolled down with his maimed and shattered legs flapping helplessly against its ragged sides as he rolled. Then had come the British counter-attack, and the hole had claimed some more of the unfortunates.

Now all was comparatively quiet. The sky was as dark-blue and as placid as a fine-weather-night-sky could be, and the little stars peeped and twinkled prettily down at the vision of a world gone mad below. An occasional Verey light, from one side or the other, illuminated the scene with a sickly glare that made it look more unreal and impossible than ever. The crackle of rifle-fire, or the grim spluttering of machine-guns, broke the

silence now and again, for both sides "had the wind up," and saw and heard things which, seeming to augur another attack, actually did not exist except in their throbbing, tortured brains.

Along the curve of the bowl a little Englishman lay. He had fallen in the British attack, and so was one of the earliest of the tenants. Now, amidst his agony, he was looking at it all as the Verey lights burst above, and his fancy was wandering fantastically about the scene, as in such circumstances a man's sometimes will.

He thought it was rather like a pub. he knew, back in 'Oxton. They were always a bit quiet and miserable there—same in this pub. Wouldn't be a bad idea if someone was to give 'em a song—liven 'em up a bit! Automatically he started a song himself—one of the latest "ragtime" hits just before the War had started: "*Alexander's Rag-Time Band.*" He sang it in a voice which was so queer that he didn't recognize it as his own. He tried to tell the singer to shut up, but found that the song stopped as soon as he opened his mouth to tell him! Thought they were a long time with the beer—someone had gone to the counter to get him a pint—and, he wasn't half-thirsty, too. Couldn't he neck it! Bad service in this pub., anyway—due, no doubt, to the fact that they didn't seem to have any barmaids in the place. Some landlords didn't hold with them about the place—thought they wasted time by larking with the customers! But that was rot—girls were always quicker than men, anyway! He wished that beer would come! Maybe the delay was because the

landlord, over there, seemed to have lost his arms, and there was a great hole in his body that something was dripping out of. Beer, of course! The blighter had swilled so much that it was just running out of him . . . didn't account for him losing his arms, though—unless they'd got drowned in the beer—or, maybe, he'd plunged 'em into a barrel of it, to wash his socks, or something, and they'd been bitten off by a shark.

Realized he mustn't go on like this! Wasn't quite right—getting things mixed—must be going a bit crackers. . . ! Wondered when those damned rats would stop gnawing his legs . . . when they'd had enough, he supposed. Rats got mighty hungry, sometimes! Never mind—soon be knocking-off time now. Wondered what the time was, and asked the man next to him: "Got the time on yer, mate?" No answer, and then saw that the bloke had his face buried in mud and slime—of course the mug couldn't answer *any* question like that!

Lay looking up at the stars. Clever chaps, those Fritzes—couldn't half shoot, too. Look, they'd been shooting up at the sky, and to-morrow's sun was coming through the bullet-holes. A bit of sun would help, anyway . . . !

Hullo! What was the matter? Some fool up there was commencing to patch up the holes . . . some of the stars were going out

Then he realized that the effect was caused by the head and shoulders of a man, silhouetted against the sky as he leaned and peered over the edge of the hole. Then, to the ears of the wounded man, there came a low whistle—a familiar combination

of notes reminiscent of more comfortable and happier times. With an effort he pursed his cracked and dry lips, and gave the first bar of the answering call. There came a low exclamation of satisfaction from above. Some more of the stars went out, and then, slipping and slithering, the form of a man came down the side of the hole.

"Glad you've turned up, cocky! What're you goin' to 'ave? Ain't arf a lousy lot 'ere—not a word to say to a bloke!"

"S'sh!" came the answer, in a low whisper. "Keep quiet, and pull yourself together! I've come to take you back, Nippo!"

"Blimey! It's ole Jim! Sorry I carn't salute, Capt'in—I can't find my arms at the moment!"

The man in the Captain's uniform peered closely at his friend through the darkness:

"Where's it got you, Nippo?"

"Dunno—just! Feel's though I've been split in two! That'll be good, too, won't it? We're a bit short on sergeants at the moment, and two of me'll be better than one! Have to get fresh promotion, though, 'cos, you see, half-a-sergeant 'ud be a lance-jack and a half. . . . 'Ere, by the way, matey, 'ow did you know where to find me?"

"That fellow Smith saw you get it. I found out when we got back! So I slipped out to find you!"

"Good lad! Knew you would, some'ow. Haven't got a drink about you, 'ave you?" A flask found its way to his lips, and he drank greedily.

"Blimey! But that's good . . .!"

A Verrey light burst soundlessly, and the grim hole was brightly illuminated. Nippo saw McNiel,

in his torn, muddied and blooded Captain's uniform; McNiel noted the position of Nippo's legs.

"It's the legs, is it? That's a nuisance—you can't even crawl!"

"Betcher-life I can't. Wouldn't 'ave stopped 'ere, if I could. Rotten pub., anyway!"

"Come on, then—let's get out of it! You'll have to get on my back, somehow. Look here, I'll lie down beside you, then you just roll over, and get your arms round my neck. . . . See?"

"Aye aye, sir! I mean—very good, Capt'in!"

Both Nippo's legs were broken, and the effort to get over and onto his chum's back caused him such agony that his senses came fully back to him for a time. He gasped:

"Hey, Jimmy! This won't do, mate! You'll never get me back like this! Tell you what—be a pal and put a bullet through my napper, and then get back on your own . . .!"

"See you in hell first, Nippo! If we go, we go together, old son. Now, get a grip—that's it—we're off . . .!"

Like some grotesque animal, with two of its legs crippled, the pair looked as McNiel, slowly and painfully, climbed up the side of the hole with his chum on his back. Getting over the brink was horribly dangerous, but by the grace of God no Verey lights went up just then. Afterwards, worming his way along the ground like some caterpillar, laying flat and crushing face and body into the foul, squelching mud every time a light went up, McNiel made his way slowly back to the British trench. When he was quite near, he felt the limp

body on his back shaken by sudden and violent spasms of trembling.

"What's wrong, Nippo?" he whispered—a sudden fear that, after all his efforts, it was the death spasm that was shaking his chum.

The reply came back:

"*Blimey!*" With a mixed sense of relief and irritation, McNiel realized that his burden was *laughing!* "Blimey! My ole man used to be a bit of an actor—you know, carrying a banner in the crowd, an' so on! 'E was mighty proud, 'cos once 'e played the 'in' legs of an elephant! But I'll bet 'e never dreamed o' playin' a part like this!"

"Like *what?*"

"Why, like this one wot I'm playin' now—the shell on the back of a blinkin' tortoise!"

Two minutes later the pair were dragged, by friendly hands, into the front-line trench!

CHAPTER V

RIFT IN LUTE!

DURING the War Jimmy McNiell received only a few letters from Carol Royston. The first, which reached him soon after he joined up, relieved his mind considerably.

In it she wrote:—

" . . . You are perfectly right, my darling. After all, our little affairs, important though they may be to us, cannot count against the needs of your country, and—what is more important to me—your manhood! You will come back to me, I know, and you will find me waiting . . . !"

The other letters were rare, and all the dearer for that. During the War it was not easy to get private correspondence from the South American Coast to the front-line trenches—and Captain Royston elected to continue his rather nefarious activities in the former part of the world.

Wounded twice, and with a V.C. to his credit (not for the incident related in the last chapter, but for one infinitely less hazardous) McNiell's first thought on demobilization was to go back to South America and to see Carol again before he started in on the business of getting a home together.

Fortuitous chance enabled him (as he thought) to combine the two efforts. The representative of a minor Republic out there—that of Santa Catalina

—happened to be introduced to McNiel by a comrade of the War. And it seemed that the President of Santa Catalina, one José Alguero, had pronounced European views on most things, and was anxious to get British officers for the nice little Army he was forming for his own aggrandisement. McNiel, knowing what fairly important officials in some of the South American republics could make "on the side" and elsewhere, saw double opportunity here—to meet Carol again, and to lay the foundation stone of the little fortune which was to make a home for them both.

He accepted the overtures of the representative, and, in due course, sailed for Buenos Aires, with the faithful Nippo, of course, in tow.

In Buenos Aires he heard news of Captain Royston, whose doings and exploits were stock fables in every saloon where sailors congregated. He could hear nothing of the gun-runner's daughter, however, beyond the fact that she was still with her father, that she was "one hell of a looker," and that "it was a mighty marvel she didn't get hitched up somewhere!" Jimmy smiled at the latter comment—*he* knew something about that!

There is no need to go into details of the early career of Jimmy and the faithful Nippo in the Army of the Republic of Santa Catalina. Jimmy started as a Captain, Nippo (who resolutely refused a commission at the beginning) as a Sergeant. They saw active service (of the type peculiar to the lesser South American republics) in three revolutions, which, for all that they savoured of musical comedy, were decidedly deadly in parts.

Promotion came rapidly. José Alguiro was an unscrupulous ruffian, but he was also a clever man and a keen psychologist. He saw in Jimmy a brave, resourceful and decidedly useful man. So it was that the latter part of 1921 saw Jimmy McNiel holding down the double rank of General in the Army of the Republic, and Colonel commanding the "Presidential Guard"—a body of picked men, mostly Europeans, whose main business it was to protect President Alguiro from bodily harm (with which he was everlastingly threatened) and generally to look after his not-too-honest interests. But Alguiro knew McNiel's limitations where dishonesty was concerned, and took care not to entrust him with any of the dirtier work.

At this time Nippo, his scruples finally overcome, was a lieutenant, also in the Garde del President—with a reputation for ruthlessness and dare-devilry which made him a much feared man.

McNiel had written regularly to Carol, but never once had he received a reply. He strongly suspected that her father was intercepting the letters, and frequently thought of throwing up his job and going to seek the *Induna*. But the gun-runner was very much a bird of passage, and would be difficult to find. Nevertheless, he had finally made up his mind to ask Alguiro for a long leave, or, as an alternative, to resign his commission, in order to go and find his lady-love, when the long-expected and desired letter arrived out of the blue!

It was a short and rather curious epistle. After a few lines of words such as lovers use after long absence and silence, the missive went on like this:

"Something happened to your letters, my darling—I don't know what—but I've only just received them—or most of them at any rate, in one batch. Now, prepare yourself for good news. Almost as soon as you get this letter, father and I—and the old Induna—will also be in Santa Catalina! Isn't that lovely? But—there is no rose without its thorn—and the thorn here is that father knows all about us now, and is adopting a rather queer attitude, and one of which I do not think you will approve. He will talk to you when you meet—do not, on any account, allow him to persuade you to do anything against your better judgment or your conscience. Remember that I trust you utterly, and shall always love you with all my heart and soul—whatever happens. I am in haste to catch the mail, my dear one . . .!"

Jimmy McNiel read this rather mysterious epistle in his room at the Citadel of Angelica, the sea-board capital of the little Republic. He read it through twice, and wondered what the devil old Royston would have to say to him—other than to abuse him for a daughter-stealing pirate!

Still puzzling over it, he rose to his feet and walked over to the window, which overlooked the little harbour. And, then and there, he got the shock of his life! For lying there, resting peacefully at anchor on the blue waters of the harbour, was the *Induna*, in her famous disguise as a steam-yacht!

On this occasion her name was not the s.v. *Clytie*, as he discovered after a hasty stare through his field-glasses. She was called the *Amphibian*, now, and her colours had been altered to blue-and-white; also the American instead of the British flag drooped

gracefully from her mast-head. But the sailor-trained eyes of General McNiel recognised her immediately.

Staring at her in bewildered delight, a cold and unpleasant thought suddenly came to him. He had heard of an American yacht called the *Amphibian*. She was the property of one Stephen Curtis, a Yankee steel-millionaire. . . .

"By God!" McNiel swore softly to himself. "There's some funny business going on here!"

And the fact that, for some weeks, a potential revolution of a somewhat serious nature had been brewing in Santa Catalina gave him a line as to the sort of business which had brought Captain Royston and his disguised vessel into that harbour.

McNiel could see grave and serious complications, likely to involve considerable embarrassment to say the least of it, for himself in this visit from the gun-runner. But, for the moment, he could not face the problem—he was too absorbed in the knowledge that his sweetheart was so close to him again at long last!

He rang his bell and roared for his orderly and his horse. In five minutes, in all the glory of his ornate uniform as *Generalissimo* of the Catalanian Army, he was clattering through the streets to the harbour, with his orderly, moaning at the strange madness of haste which always seemed to possess these accursed Englishmen, riding sulkily at his heels.

He sought out the Harbour-Commandant without delay.

"I want that stink-boat of yours to take me out to the yacht there!" was his curt greeting to

the Commandant, who seemed unusually excited, even for him.

"Aha! So then you have already heard? And this visit, it is of the most official, eh?"

"On the contrary, it is entirely unofficial! And what is this I am supposed to have heard?"

"Why, of the yacht! That it belongs to the so great Americano richman—Meester Curtis! I tell you, there will be doings in Angelica while that yacht is here!"

"Like hell there will!" McNiel agreed, thinking to himself that it looked uncommonly as though those suspicions of his were painfully correct!

As the puffing, snorting little motor-launch, missing and back-firing at almost every stroke as usual, but with the myriad-coloured flag of the Republic flaunting proudly from its stern, approached the yacht, Royston stared sourly at it from his bridge.

"What in the name of Moses have we got this time?" he growled. "More of these monkey-faced officials after a bit of graft and a drink, I suppose!"

Royston was wearing immaculate drill "civvies," with a tie which rivalled the Catalanian standard itself in the matter of colour-scheme. Beside him stood Carol, dressed like the daughter of a Yankee millionaire, but looking twice as sweet and beautiful, and searching the shore eagerly with longing eyes. The First Mate, a little in the rear, was once more, as on a memorable previous occasion, promoted to the brass-bound uniform of Captain.

Even as Royston spoke, Carol gave a little cry:

"Why, it's Jimmy himself!"

Royston's mouth tightened, and he growled:

"Is it, by Gad! He looks more like a lion-tamer in a ruddy circus than anything else, at the moment!"

But Carol was already racing down the ladder, to meet her lover as, with the sun flaming back from the white-and-gold of his uniform, and his accoutrements clinking and clanking with gay music, he mounted to the deck.

"Carol! At last!"

"Jimmy! My darling . . .!"

They were in each other's arms, and the whole world had stopped moving! (The orderly, looking on with appreciative eyes, decided that the General was not so mad after all, for all that he was English!)

Carol took him below, and, for a while, they had the saloon to themselves, in which to talk the idiotic nothings which all lovers, after a long separation, delight to indulge in. Jimmy never asked her what was in her father's mind—the fact being that he had temporarily forgotten both her father and his mind as well!

Before he could remember them again, Royston himself, in his millionaire-disguise, broke in upon them.

"Now!" he said, tersely. "If you two have quite finished playing the giddy goat, perhaps, Carol, you'll clear out and let me talk business to this young fellow of yours?"

His manner was abnormally genial, but, for all that, Carol's face suddenly whitened, and her beautiful eyes filled with apprehension. She gave

her lover one warning look, and then, without a word, she left them.

The conversation which ensued was brief, and to the point:

"I gather," Royston opened the ball, drily, "that you want to marry my girl?"

McNiel, watching him warily, nodded.

"Well, once upon a time I wouldn't have stood for it. Now—well, it depends! I'm no younger than I was, and I want someone I can really trust to help me with this racket of mine. Now, I know you to be trustworthy, and I know you've got guts—so I'm inclined to consider the ideal!"

It was on the tip of McNiel's tongue to point out that he had no slightest notion of spending the rest of his life at the nefarious business of gun-running, but he pulled himself up in time, and wisely held his tongue. He merely said:

"I see!"

"But I'll want to try you out first, of course! Now, the present situation is one that affords a fine opportunity for the said try-out! As you may guess, I've got aboard here a nice little cargo of shooters and stuff for these revolutionaries of yours, and, with your aid, I reckon it'll be easy to play the same game as we did at Montevideo—and that's why I'm here as Mister Stephen Curtis, the notorious millionaire! Get me?"

McNiel's face was very grim, and his voice dead quiet, as he answered with a question:

"And—you expect me to help you? Against the Government that employs me, and pays me?"

Royston looked at him with lifted eyebrows:

"Why, sure I do! I reckon it won't need much thinking to decide between Mr. President Alguiro on one hand, and my Carol on the other, will it?"

"None at all!" snapped McNiel. "Because the decision won't be necessary—the choice doesn't exist! D'you realize that you're asking me to do on President Alguiro what I wouldn't do seven years ago on you. . . !" He leaned forward, and looked the other straight in the eyes, and added, with meaning: "In spite of what you did!"

Royston stiffened, and his mouth set fiercely:

"Meaning?"

"Just that I'm no murderer, and I don't as a rule act as accomplice in cold-blooded, cowardly murders! Yet when I saw you commit one, Royston, I kept my mouth shut—because I was in your employ, and taking your money! And now—I'm going to act the same way by Alguiro! That's all!"

"You mean you won't help me?"

"I mean just that!"

"Then, by God, you'll never get my girl!"

McNiel leaned forward again. His eyes were narrowed, and his mouth set like a rat-trap. He spoke between his teeth:

"And I wouldn't—if I could only get her by playing dirty tricks, Royston! But that's another matter—and it is for Carol to decide, not you! And now I'll tell you something else! I'll give you exactly twenty-four hours to up anchor and get out of this harbour—with your cargo still aboard. For that matter I'll see you get no chance to discharge it! You can make up your mind to

that—and if you're here at this time to-morrow morning I'll go straight to Alguiro and tell him just who and what you are!"

Royston sneered openly:

"And what do you think Carol will say to that?"

"If she's the girl I think she is, she'll agree with me!"

McNiel was a little astonished at the captain's manner. He had fully expected a display of violence, and to be ordered off the ship immediately. But neither of these things happened. Although obviously restraining his anger with an effort, Royston merely shrugged his shoulders, and said:

"Well, that's what you say now—maybe you'll change your mind by to-morrow morning. Or before!"

"I shouldn't bet on it!" retorted McNiel.

Though neither of them knew it, the whole of this conversation was abortive. For at that very moment Fate, in the shape and person of Nippo, was taking a hand.

Nippo, off duty, had been taking a stroll round the harbour when he caught sight of the disguised *Induna* and recognized her. He was staring at her with goggling eyes and dropped jaw when the Harbour-Commandant approached him, and explained to whom the handsome yacht was supposed to belong. And Nippo, for the moment entirely forgetful of Carol, and his chum's interest in her, promptly blurted out:

"American millionaire me blinkin' foot! That hooker belongs to Cappy Royston, the cleverest

filibuster on the perishin' coast—and I'll bet he's not here for fun, either!" And he then proceeded to relate, in detail, the story of Royston's Montevideo *coup*.

The Harbour-Commandant was impressed. Further, he saw possible advancement for himself in this!

"You will keep the mouth shut, eh, Lieutenant? It will be better so! Myself, I will see to it that no guns are run!"

It was at that instant that recollection of Carol and Jimmy McNiel came to Nippo's mind, and the Commandant, who was watching him closely, saw the consternation in his eyes.

"Just a minute, old cock!" gasped Nippo. "There's a bit more to this than you know of! I must see Jimmy at once!"

"See who?" asked the Commandant.

"General McNiel!"

"But that will be easy—for the General is on board that very boat at this moment. He will be coming ashore soon, no doubt, and you can wait for him!"

"Oh, fine!" cried Nippo.

"And while waiting," went on the wily Commandant, who did not quite understand what it was all about but sensed that his little plan for becoming the Saviour of his Country (with some profit to himself) was in danger. "While waiting, perhaps the Señor Lieutenant will step into my poor abode and drink with me a glass of wine?"

"Finer still!" exclaimed Nippo, whose thirst was ever-present.

The house of the Commandant stood just inside the main gates of the harbour, enclosed inside a neat little hedge. His wine was good—and he himself had some knowledge of drugs.

"My word, but this is good stuff!" Nippo exclaimed as he tossed off a glass of wine brought to him by the Commandant himself.

"Then the Señor will take another?" suggested the wily one.

"I will that!"

The Commandant's face wore a self-satisfied smile, which might have been caused by pleasure at his guest's appreciation of his wine—but wasn't that altogether!

Nippo drained a second glass.

"My word, but that's the stuff to give 'em! Blimey, it's got a—kick—in—it . . . ! Shum—somehow I feel—quite—tight. . . !"

The Commandant caught him neatly as he crumpled at the knees, and thereafter carried him carefully upstairs and laid him on a bed. He did not bother to lock the door, knowing that Nippo was safe for three or four hours or so at least, and by that time . . . !

General McNiel, who had his duties to perform, left the *Amphibian* with somewhat mixed feelings. The predominant one was joy, because he was going to spend the whole afternoon with his beloved—but behind it there was more than a spice of anxiety. He knew something of Captain Royston, and the way that gentleman was taking his recent reverse was, to say the least of it, sinister! He was altogether too little disturbed, and also too amenable!

That afternoon the lovers, as lovers will, did their best to cover the hiatus of seven years which had split their young lives. They drove out of the town in an open carriage, with an imposing escort of McNiel's men surrounding them—for the roads were very unsafe for Government folk just then.

A mile or so out of the town they stopped, and then they sat together in a little glade, surrounded and sheltered by trees which, in their turn, were surrounded and guarded by McNiel's men.

They were as alone as though they were in the midst of a desert, or adrift on a raft at sea.

"You haven't changed much, darling!" McNiel told her. "Except that you are more lovely than ever!"

She blushed delightfully, and then said:

"But you have, quite a lot!"

"Heavens!" cried McNiel, in mock terror. "Don't say that you won't love me any more!"

"Silly boy! I didn't say you've changed for the *worse*! You look lots older, though, than you ought to in seven years—much more stern and manly—and a bit grimmer, too!"

"One lived fast in France!" said McNiel. "A year in a day—aye, and in an hour, sometimes!"

Her eyes were full of sympathy:

"Was it very bad, darling?"

"Just hell!" answered McNiel, simply.

A little later he spoke to her about his interview with her father. She nodded, her face grave and her eyes dark with apprehension:

"Yes. He told me about it! He was furious, though he was suppressing it very carefully. Which

makes me frightened, for I know father! He told me I was to persuade you to 'be more sensible,' and I said (rather ambiguously, I am afraid) that I would talk to you about it. I was afraid he wouldn't let me come this afternoon if I didn't!"

"Well, and what is your advice to me?" McNiel asked her. "Am I to do as he says—betray my master and my trust, and be false to the oath of allegiance which I swore when I entered the service of Alguiro?"

"Certainly not!" answered Carol, with spirit. And then added, in a softer tone: "You will do what you think best, belovedest! It is bound to be right—or I shall think so, in any case!"

"Which amounts to the same thing, so far as I am concerned!" responded McNiel, kissing her with infinite relief.

Later, they spoke of the future.

"I don't know what we're going to do, now!" Carol told him, with some dismay. "Father will put his foot right down about you after this, that's certain!"

McNiel nodded, gravely.

"Better bow to the wind for the moment!" he said. "And just make the best of things! But, look here, darling, this can't go on for ever! We've wasted seven good years as it is—and I think one more will be enough, don't you? Now, I'm making quite a lot of money here—a fellow in my position can. In twelve months I shall have enough for us to start life on—and in twelve months my agreed period of service here is ended. Now, I'll make an appointment with you—because we may not see or hear from each other again till then. You

remember you spoke to me once of Da Costa's—that little tea-shop in Buenos Aires?"

"Yes?"

"Well, *whatever happens*, we meet there at noon on—let me see—the fifteenth of November, next year—1922! And I'll have the wedding ring in my pocket! Now, is that a bet?"

"That's a bet, darling!" she whispered. And then: "Oh, Jimmy, I'm so happy. . . !" And she hid her blushing face in his epaulettes—which, cold and wiry as they were, she seemed to find infinitely comforting!

An hour later they drove back to Angelica, and, having dismissed his escort, McNiel handed her over to her father, at the principal hotel in the town. He learned they were both going straight up to the Presidency, as Alguiro had expressed a wish to meet the distinguished visitor to his country. And Royston winked wickedly at McNiel as he conveyed this information. From the smiling, happy faces of the two, he was pretty certain that his daughter had persuaded her lover to "see reason!"

McNiel went back to the Citadel, where some work waited for him. He had not been there an hour when Nippo, white as a sheet, blear-eyed, and not too steady in his gait, came stumbling into his office.

"Hullo!" exclaimed McNiel. "What the devil have you been doing to yourself, Nippo?"

"That don't matter a blind bean!" answered the Cockney, in a tone of the deepest depression. "It's what I've done to *you* that counts! Jimmy, I've bin and busted the whole blinkin' show for you, that's what I've done!"

"What d'you mean?"

Nippo dropped limply into a chair, and blurted out the whole story of how he had recognized the disguised *Induna*; how he had, unthinkingly, told the Commandant what she really was, and how the Commandant, plainly fearing that he would get in first with the news, and seeking aggrandizement for himself, had drugged him and left him on the bed.

"And the swine's been with the President ever since!" he groaned, in conclusion. "I found that out when I tried to find him—to knock his perishin' block off for him!"

McNiel sprang to his feet. He was white to the lips:

"Good God!" he half-whispered. "And Carol went to the Presidency, with Royston, half-an-hour ago!"

The two stared at each other in the blankest dismay.

Strangely enough, it was Nippo who recovered himself first:

"For Christ's sake come on, Jimmy!" he cried, shaking his comrade roughly by the shoulder. "We must get busy! They're in the soup by this time—Alguiro'll be shooting Royston up against a wall, and as for the girl—well, you know Alguiro!"

"By God, I do!" said McNiel, between his clenched teeth.

He snatched his sabre from the wall, and buckled it on, saw that his revolver was in its holster, and then, with a curt: "Come on!" made for the door.

McNiel's horse, still saddled, was standing in

the courtyard. There were some others there also, and Nippo borrowed one of these.

Five minutes later they clattered through the gates of the Presidency—to which McNiel always had the *entrée*—and tossed their reins to an orderly. As they reached the main entrance they saw the Harbour-Commandant, looking very pleased with himself, descending the handsome marble steps which led to the doors.

"What's happened?" McNiel demanded of him. The Commandant attributed McNiel's obvious agitation to anxiety for the well-being of the Republic and its President.

"All is well, señor!" he announced, placidly—with a slyly triumphant look at Nippo, whose face really ought to have warned him! "All is very well indeed! The plot I have fully exposed—the gun-ship will be taken after dark, when they are not prepared!"

"But the people—the man and his daughter who came here a while back? What of them?"

The Commandant's smile broadened:

"It is all well! The man—that Captain Royston—he is up against the wall, about to be shot! The señorita—she is with the President! I think he is a very lucky man—for the señorita is very beautiful, and the guns, no doubt, will be most useful!"

But McNiel was not listening to him—he knew something of his President's ways with women, and knew also that time was of the utmost importance!

Nippo paused for a moment. He bent towards the Commandant as though to whisper something

to him most confidentially—and then unobtrusively kicked his legs from under him.

"'Ullo!" said Nippo. "Fallen down, ain't you? Must 'ave 'ad one over the eight, old cock'. 'Ere, let me 'elp you!"

He bent over the fallen man as though to help him up, and then, gripping him firmly by the collar of his tunic, he choked his blasphemies by the simple but effective method of rubbing his face, with a brisk circular movement, into the gravel! Then he hurried after McNiel.

The President's private sanctum was on the first floor, and McNiel guessed he would find him there. He went up the stairs three at a time, and burst into the room without the ceremony of knocking.

The scene that he found there was a characteristic one—characteristic, that is, of José Alguiro, who was a little, dark, undersized man, with more than a suggestion of the negro in his make-up.

At the moment he was standing by the window. In one big, hairy hand he held Carol's two wrists, crushing them in an iron grip, and all the time talking to her in soft, smooth tones which belied, nevertheless, the cruelty which shone from his narrowed eyes as he watched the white, agonized face, and felt the pull of the slender, shrinking body against his grip.

"It is good you should see the death of your father!" he was saying. "It will be a lesson to you, my dear! You will see how, if necessary, all must be given up for Alguiro! Your good father, he is about to give his life up for him, and, no doubt, he will give it up without shrinking, like

a brave man! Presently, you, too, will be called upon to give up much to me—but it is not your life I shall ask for! Not yet, *carissima*—maybe when I have done with you, so that no other man may enjoy what I shall have enjoyed so much . . . !”

He paused to look out of the window:

“See!” he said, in a tone of pleasant anticipation. “Here comes the firing-party. It will soon be over now—but you must look, *donna mia*—to see the last of the good father . . . !”

He suddenly gave her arms a savage jerk, dragging her towards the open window—and it was at this moment that McNiel burst into the room. He took in the situation in one second; in two he had ripped his big sabre from its scabbard and in a stride he was close to Alguiro, holding the weapon so that the point touched the President’s body.

“Let go that lady!” his voice was low, but the tone was infinitely compelling. His face greying with fear, the President obeyed. He spoke no word, but his eyes were flaming with a mixture of fear and rage. One imagined that things would not go well with General McNiel if President Alguiro ever again got the upper hand of him!

“Keep your arms close to your sides—and don’t move them!” was McNiel’s next order. He glanced quickly out of the window, and took in in a flash the grim scene being enacted in the courtyard below—Royston with his back to the white wall, and the firing party lined up only a few feet away from him.

“Put your ugly face out of that window and countermand that execution—*pronto!*” McNiel

ordered. "And be careful—one word or sign to those men below, and I'll spit you like a game-cock!"

As Alguiro sulkily obeyed, and leaned out of the window, McNiel's sabre-point was pricking the small of his back, but was concealed by the President's own body from anyone below.

"Tell them to bring him up here!" McNiel directed, when the other order had been given. And again Alguiro, feeling the menacing prick of that sabre, obeyed, for all that his whole form was shaking with rage.

McNiel threw a word over his shoulder to Nippo, who was standing by the door:

"Get outside—and see that no one comes in except Royston!"

"Right!" said Nippo, and vanished, closing the door behind him.

Alguiro, drawing back from the window, but still keeping his arms stiffly at his sides, turned on McNiel:

"You traitorous dog!" he snarled. "So this is what your oath of allegiance amounts to, does it?"

"Sorry, Alguiro!" answered McNiel, pleasantly. "But there's no harm actually done to the Republic, as a matter of fact! No arms will be run for the rebels—and none ever would have been. But I can't let you murder and misuse my friends, I'm afraid!"

There was a slight noise outside the door. It was cautiously opened by Nippo to admit Royston, and then quickly closed again.

And then the thing happened!

McNiel's attention was diverted for a split-second when Royston came in—and, in that split-second, Alguiro's temper got the better of him. Furious at being foiled in regard to Carol, and determined that if he could not have her no one else should, he took advantage of McNiel's momentary unwariness to whip a long stiletto from the red silk sash he wore, and to spring at the girl like a panther.

Royston saw it, and gave a sharp exclamation. McNiel whipped round even as the springing form of the President was in mid-air! There was only one thing to do, and McNiel did it! The heavy sabre whirled up into the air, and came down with a vicious humming sound. The terrible blade took Alguiro square on the crown of the head, and sank right through into the neck, so that the President's face split grotesquely down the centre, and the two halves flopped over sideways, like the divided pieces of a split orange!

Carol, a self-possessed young woman at all times, stifled a scream by forcing her knuckles into her mouth. She shrank away from the mess of blood and brains that spurted and splattered all over the room, as the body of Alguiro, pulled up short in its spring, thudded in a crumpled heap on the carpeted floor.

Nippo thrust his head round the door and stared at the tragic scene.

"Oh, cripes!" he gasped. "That's about torn it!" And he came into the room and hastily shut the door behind him.

Royston gave vent to an ugly sneer:

"That makes us almost quits, doesn't it?"

"Hardly!" retorted McNiel, coldly. "My man was conscious—and armed! Anyway, you're a grateful hound, aren't you?" He glanced at Carol, and gathered from her ghastly face that she was near to fainting. "We'd better get out of here, *pronto!*" he went on. "Someone may want to come in at any minute!"

He ushered them out, taking the key from inside the door, locking it on the outside, and then putting the key in his pocket.

"That's a strong door, reinforced with steel!" he said, with a faint grin. "Thanks to Alguiro being nervous about his enemies, it'll take 'em some time to open it! Now, come along—and look as calm and natural as possible!"

There was no one in sight. The four passed down the stairs and out of the door. As they went out of the gates the sentries saluted McNiel, who returned their salutes with an easy, nonchalant air. Outside they hailed a hackney carriage, into which Royston and Carol got. Then they drove down to the harbour, with McNiel and Nippo riding closely on either side of the vehicle.

The motor-launch from the *Amphibian* was still lying against the jetty, waiting for Royston and Carol. As they went aboard McNiel said to Royston:

"I guess you'll have to put up with us till you make the next port, Captain! This place'll be too hot to hold us after what's happened!"

And then Royston acted in an amazing fashion. He turned savagely on McNiel:

"I should think so!" he snarled. "After you gave us away, you double-crossing crook! Get to

hell out of it!" And he struck him a vicious blow under the jaw that sent him staggering back against the wall behind him!

It was a moment or two before McNiel could recover from this surprising attack, by which time the launch had put off and was already heading for the yacht. The first thing he did when his vision cleared was to look anxiously for Carol. But she was lying prone in the launch, apparently in a dead faint. The final scene had been too much for her, after all she had gone through in the last hour!

McNiel, staring after the receding boat in a sort of daze, was aroused by Nippo's grip on his arm:

"Wake up, chum!" said the Cockney, grimly. "We'd better be getting out of this—it's an even-money chance whether you'll be the ex-Generalissimo McNiel, or the *late* Generalissimo McNiel before long!"

They mounted their horses, and galloped back to the Citadel. There McNiel got his bank-roll from its hiding-place, and they both changed into civilian clothing. Then they mounted again and rode out of the town.

They were just outside it when they heard the clanging of bells, and the boom of the alarm-gun from the Citadel.

"Blimey!" commented Nippo. "The hunt's up already—come on!"

They broke into a gallop, heading for the open country.

A mile or so along the road they ran into a small band of armed men—plainly revolutionaries.

"The President has been killed!" Nippo informed them, in Spanish. "Better collect your men and get into the town—now's your big chance!"

The men galloped off, full of excitement.

"That was a brain-wave!" Nippo grinned. "I guess they'll be too busy soon in Angelica to bother about us!"

But McNiel, who was glooming, never so much as smiled!

CHAPTER VI

RECRUITS FOR THE LEGION!

DA COSTA'S tea-shop is one of the show places of Buenos Aires, much patronized by visitors to that handsome city.

Outside it, just before midday on the fifteenth of November, 1922, a lean, young-old man, in clean but rather worn white drill, stood waiting, betraying his excitement and eagerness only by the light in his eyes, and the slight trembling of his hands as he rolled cigarette after cigarette, in the one-handed fashion dear to the natives.

It was McNiel, who had come to keep his twelve month old appointment with Carol.

She was late, but he waited on.

And then, presently, there came a ragged, dirty sailor-man, who gave him a long, searching stare, and then spat. After which he inquired:

"Does your name happen to be McNiel?"

McNiel whipped round on the sailor, and gave a quick affirmative. Fear had suddenly crept into his eyes—an emotion, not usually to be found displayed therein.

"Yes, that's my name. Why?"

"I've got a message—a letter—for you, that's all!"

A chill of fear wrapped itself round the heart of Jim McNiel. It clawed sickeningly at his vitals, and made his head buzz inside.

"Who's it from?" he demanded, agitation in his voice.

The sailor shot a keen, suspicious glance at him:

"Who d'you expect here this morning, anyway?" he asked, warily.

"A lady—Captain Royston's daughter!"

"That's right! This here letter's from her!"

"She—she's all right?"

"Was when I saw her last! That's to say her health was good enough. Not so sure of her spirits!"

He found the letter after deep searching in the intimate depths of his ragged clothing. The envelope was very dirty, and had, at some time, been in the water.

McNiel snatched it and hastily ripped it open. The letter it contained was very brief:

"Oh, my darling! I can't get to you—isn't it awful? I don't know what's happened to father—I believe he's going queer in his head! He watches me continually, and I know he suspects I want to run away to you. I can never get out of his sight now for more than five minutes at a time, that is why this note will be so short. By the time you get it, we—father and I—will be in Morocco. He is taking arms there for the Riffs, and says he is going to stop there to help them fight the French, whom he hates. (I think he also wants to get me away from the country that holds you, my dear one!) He says we shall never come back here again. So, if you love me, come and find me as quickly as you can! Give the man who brings this, some money—he is jumping the ship just to bring this to you for me.

"All my love for ever,

"Come soon, my darling!"

"Carol.

Relieved as he was to know that she was well, the news contained in the letter was a terrible disappointment to Jim McNiel. For Morocco was a long way off, and he was almost without means!

The sailor, watching him, spoke:

"Does she say anything about giving me some dough?" he asked, with obvious anxiety.

McNiel nodded:

"You broke?"

"Broke as hell! I've been hanging around here for a fortnight on the bum, waiting for you!"

"Hard luck!" McNiel dove into his shirt, and produced a thin wad of notes.

"All I've got's twenty!" he announced. "You can have ten of it!"

The sailor shook his head.

"If that's all you've got," he said, "five'll do me! I can get a ship before next tide, I reckon!"

"You're a good lad!" commented McNiel. "I'll want every cent I've got, so five it is! But, maybe, we'll meet again!"

He pushed five dollar-notes into the fellow's hand, and then turned and walked rapidly away. He had a problem to solve, and as was his habit, he solved it while walking.

On the whole, strange as it might seem, he was not altogether sorry Carol had been unable to keep their tryst. For he was not ready for her—Nippo and he had been having a bad time since they fled from Santa Catalina, and now fifteen dollars was his whole wealth. Nippo had nothing at all, for McNiel had stuck to that twenty dollars through all sorts of hardship. It might have been all Carol and he would have to start life on!

So he was relieved, in a way, that she had not turned up. But Morocco was a long way to hie—and fifteen dollars not much to do it on!”

Nevertheless, when he met Nippo later that evening, he was perfectly assured and self-confident.

“Like to see a bit of fighting—and do some, too, Nippo?”

The Cockney heaved a long sigh:

“Gawd blimey! Not ‘arf I wouldn’t! Where is it, cocky? Show us the perishin’ scrap, and watch little Bertie wade in!”

McNiel grinned:

“I’m afraid we shan’t get to it to-night, boy—it’s rather a long way off. Have you ever heard of the Riffs, Nippo?”

“Blimey, no! What is it—a river?”

“No, it’s a tribe. A hill-tribe who inhabit the wilder parts of the Atlas Mountains.”

“And where the devil’s them?”

“In Morocco!”

“I see! May be an Atlas, but right off the blink-in’ map, eh? Well, what’ve they got to do with us?”

“They’ve got a war on with the French. You see, the French have been encroaching on their country, and making them pay taxes and so on, and now they’ve kicked. They started a few months ago, under a fellow called Ab-del-Krim—an educated and enlightened sort of heathen, with plenty of both brains and guts from all accounts. Anyway, he’s giving the French a pretty warm time!”

“Sounds all right—but where do we come in?”

“We’re going to Morocco!”

“Are we, by cripes! Why?”

McNiel explained, briefly, what had happened—and after that the faithful Nippo never dreamed of questioning either the necessity or the practicability of going to Morocco at once.

"Though," said he, "seeing as how we haven't hardly got a tossing-coin between us, I don't quite see how it's going to be done!"

"Only one way!" announced McNiel, crisply. "Get to Marseilles—which isn't far from Algiers, Tunis and so on. Plenty of boats!"

"Sounds all right!" commented Nippo, drily. "How do we get to Marseilles, though? Walk or ride?"

"Work a passage!" answered McNiel, crisply. "In the stokehole if necessary!"

Nippo gave a groan:

"Oh, blimey!" he pleaded. "Not the perishin' stokehole, for Gawd's sake! I never could stand 'eat!"

"You'll find it a darned sight hotter in Morocco!" retorted his chum. "Come on, now—we're going to have a look round the docks, right away!"

No grass ever grew under the feet of Jimmy McNiel. With him to think was to act!

And so it was that about three weeks later "Little Billy Hull," lounging, as was his wont, in the bar of the Sailor's Home in Marseilles, was intrigued to see a couple of fellow-countrymen come in through the door. One of them was tall, the other short. One was, as Billy noted by "the cut of his jib," a gentleman by birth at any rate—the other, quite plainly, was of the proletariat. Both were very lean and very brown, and both were dressed in rather crumpled suits of khaki

drill. Billy, a keen observer, took note of their calloused, damaged hands, and of the fact that the smaller one still bore definite signs of black on his cuticle. Having made these observations, Billy addressed himself to them:

"Mornin'! Britishers, ain't ye?"

"That's so!" the tall one admitted, with the brevity of the man of action.

"Then have a drink on me!" Billy offered, by way of an investment. "I'm British, too. Name of Hull—Billy Hull!"

"Mine's McNiel!"

"And mine's Smiff—Nippo Smiff!" put in the little man.

"Glad to know you!" Billy Hull nodded. "And now—what's the poison!"

When the drinks were procured, and the three had settled themselves down, Billy went on with his interrogatory:

"Just come ashore, I take it?"

"That's right!"

"Come across from the East—or South America, haven't you? The latter I should say!"

"You'd be right!" agreed McNiel, tersely. He was wondering why this fat little man, with the air of a longshoreman, was so interested in them and their affairs.

"Thought so!" Billy went on. "And worked your way across in the stokehole, eh?"

Nippo thrust a hand out, as though in greeting:

"Blimey, Mister 'Olmes! Ain't you blinkin' wonderful? 'Ow ever do you do it?"

"Pretty easy!" answered Billy, composedly—and stared with some fixity at Nippo's extended

hand. The latter, following his gaze, and noting the still-adhering blackness, almost blushed—but not quite.

"No joke, is it—the stokehole, I mean?" said Billy.

"Joke? I'd say not—why, blimey, Hell's a winter-garden to it!"

"Must have wanted to get 'ere pretty bad?" Billy was continuing his little cross-examination, and still wondering whether or not these newcomers were going to be any use to him.

"Have another drink?" cut in McNiel, who was getting a little tired of the fat man's curiosity. He got the drinks, and then said:

"Now, Hull—we've told you a lot about ourselves, perhaps you can tell me something I'd like to know?"

Billy spat expertly into a distant black cuspidor:

"Shoot, brother!" he directed, briefly.

"Listen, then. What's the best way to get into Morocco? We want to get right into the Riff country, and we're broke—or all but!"

Billy stared at them, and his already somewhat prominent eyes seemed to stick out like organ-stops. Of all the luck . . . !

He pulled himself together, and leaned forward confidentially:

"Well, I'll say that just about beats the band!" he commented. "By gum, but you're lucky, you are, you two! You want to get to Morocco—right up into the Riff country—and you've got no splosh! And you've walked right into about the one man in ole Marsay who can really help you! What d'you say to that, eh?"

"Fine!" said McNiel. "And now, tell us what to do, and how to do it?"

"It's the easiest thing in the world!" Billy explained. "Provided you know the way to do it. And there ain't but one way to do it, fixed as *you* are!"

"And that is?"

Billy leaned closer, and became more than ever confidential:

"*The Legion!* Ever heard of it—the French Foreign Legion? Boys, I'm telling you, it offers the finest life in the world for a *real* man! It's the longest marching, hardest fighting crush in all the world! Its motto is *Honour and Fidelity*, and it lives up to it! 'Nother thing—they take you on your face value, there in the Legion! Doesn't matter what you was before, nor what you've done, neither! No questions asked! Good food, good clothes, good pay—and a mighty good time, too! They tell a lot o' lies about the climate in Morocco—but as a matter of fact it's a good one—warm and healthy! And the girls . . .! I tell you, boys, them Eastern girls bring tears to your eyes just to look at 'em—and there's no need to stop at that, neither! They ain't standoffish, the little birds out there . . .!"

But McNiel, who was not interested in any girls but one, cut in:

"You've got the patter well, pardner! Anyone would think you were out recruiting for the Legion, to hear you!"

The shot went home. Billy drew in his horns, and made answer a trifle sulkily:

"Well, what's the matter? You asked me to put

you wise, and I'm doing it, ain't I? Now, listen! You want to get right up country in Morocco—right up into the Atlas, which is where the Riff hangs out! Fine! Now, I don't ask *why* you want to get there—that ain't no business of mine. But I tell you this! Even if you weren't broke—even if you'd got all the dough in the world—you'd have a hell of a job to get much nearer to the Atlas than Marrakesh—which is some way off! Remember, there's a war on—and my advice to you, if you really want to get there, is to join the Legion! You can take it from me it won't be long before you're sent up country—and when you get there, all you have to do is to watch your chance, and cut your lucky—meanwhile you'll have had a free passage out, free food, grub and clobber! What in hell more do you want?"

"You mean—desert?" McNiel asked.

"Sure I do!"

"Fairly easy, is it?"

Billy Hull let go a large, fat chuckle:

"The easiest thing in the world! Why, hundreds do it! They slip away and marry Riff girls—they're real lookers, those girls—and settle down as poultry farmers, and what not!"

McNiel drew a long breath, and squared his shoulders. Then he swung round on Nippo:

"That's the game, my lad! The Foreign Legion for us! Now, we'll go right out and find the recruiting-office!"

But Billy Hull suddenly showed signs of agitation:

"Don't you be a ruddy fool!" he exclaimed, laying a detaining hand on McNiel's sleeve. "If

you try to get in in the regular way, you'll have all sorts of trouble! For instance, as you may know, a mighty lot of queer birds join up in the Legion—in fact, most of them as join are on the run for something or other! Now, the Frenchman don't give a damn about that—and once you're in the Legion, you're safe from all the police in the world. But there's one thing they are mighty particular over—and that's if the French police want you for anything!"

"Well, that's all right!" McNiel interpolated. "The French police don't want us for anything!"

"Dessay not!" retorted Billy. "But they'll want to prove that to their own satisfaction! If you go along in the ordinary way they'll hold you for inquiries—and that'll mean you'll be hanging about, more or less in the calaboose, for a couple o' weeks while the *gendarmes* go into your record. They ain't so fast, these Frenchies."

"What do you suggest, then?" McNiel inquired.

A faint light of greed shone at the back of Billy's pale eyes. He became very confidential once more.

"Reckon I might be able to help you!" he announced. "See here, how much money have you got?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"I'll tell you! I've got a pal—a Frenchy, but a decent lad. Now, he's right in with the recruiting blokes, and he can get you in right away—without any trouble at all! Why, I can guarantee that if you come along and see him right away, you'll be on the boat for Oran by midday to-morrow! But, of course, my friend will want a *pourboire*—not so

much for himself as to drop a little bit to the recruiting officials, to see you get through quickly. Get me? Right—now, how much can you afford?”

“I said we were broke! What’s the least he’ll take, this pal of yours?”

“Oh, about fifty francs!”

McNiel appeared to make a calculation. Then he shook his head:

“Can’t be done! Twenty-five’s the limit!”

Little Billy Hull held out his hand:

“All right! Give me your twenty-five, and I’ll see what can be done!”

But his tone was just a little too eager: the open-palm just a trifle too ready! Instead of finding notes thrust into it, his wrist was suddenly seized in a grip of steel—a grip that, in its strength and its tensity, was really frightening!

“Now, listen, you little rat!” McNiel hissed at him, between his clenched teeth. “I’ve got you now! I’ve tumbled to your little game! This is your business—you sit here and wait for likely fellows to come off the boats, and then, if you can’t wheedle ’em into joining up in your infernal Legion, you dope ’em and shanghai ’em into it! And if you can squeeze a bit o’ *buckshee* dough out of ’em first, or rob ’em of it after you’ve administered the knock-out drops, no doubt you do it! But you’re not doing it on *us*, see? You’re not the only one that gets up early in the morning, my lad!”

During this telling-off Billy’s face had been getting pastier and pastier, and his soft, flabby limbs more and more tremulous. He was scared stiff. He tried to stammer something, but McNiel cut him short:

"Now, I reckon your advice is good, and the Legion is the best way for us to get into Morocco—though I've no doubt you've told us a string of lies about *that*. So, if you like to take us along to this precious pal of yours, we're ready to sign on—and you're welcome to your share of the commission you no doubt get for each recruit you nobble. But you'll get no money out of us, so make up your mind to that! And if you don't care to do it that way—well, we'll go along and join up on our own . . .!"

"No, no!" Billy was vastly relieved that his fat hide was safe—and, after all, half a loaf was better than no bread! True, he usually managed to make a bit "on the side"—over and above the share of commission he got from his friend, the agent—by either swindling or robbing his victims out of a few francs. But he'd just have to forego that, in this case!

"You come along right now, and I'll fix everything for you!" he went on, eagerly, and, as McNiel released him, he bounded to his feet like a rubber-ball, for all that his limbs were still shaking from the effects of his recent fright. "Come on—this way!"

"Right you are!" said McNiel. "But don't try any more funny stuff, or——!" And Billy, shuddering at the tone in his voice, eagerly led the way into the street.

As they made their way along the dirty, narrow back streets of Marseilles, McNiel looked curiously about him. He dropped a little behind the others. Nippo strode on beside the still nervous Billy, eyeing him much as a terrier might a rat, and with just about as much friendliness.

Billy made one or two attempts at conversation, but soon gave that up! He led the way in silence, and occasionally glanced nervously back at the following McNiel as though he expected him to stick a knife in his back at any moment! Poor Billy had had a very nasty shock!

But McNiel was not worrying about Billy. He was absorbed in watching the types of people about him, and recalling old war-time recollections of the city.

On the corner of a tranverse street they almost ran into a couple coming along the other street. The woman was bold-faced, rather over-dressed, and heavily-made up, yet handsome after a somewhat rakish style. The man looked dazed. His face was dead white, and his eyes had a haunted look in them. His mouth, too, was twitching nervously. He was holding the woman's arm as though anxious for either her support or protection. The couple turned left, and walked along in the same direction as the others, slightly in advance of them, the woman plainly leading the way.

Presently they came to the exterior of a quiet, shabby restaurant, which, somehow, possessed a sinister air. McNiel noted that it bore the incongruous name of *La Vache Rouge*. The woman and the man she was escorting went in there, and McNiel, with a smile, decided that the nomenclature of the place must refer to the type of women who used it. And then Billy Hull said:

"Here we are—we shall find my friend here!"

They entered. The interior was in keeping with the exterior, and the customers—there were quite a number of them—were a curiously mixed crowd. They were mostly men—and it was singular that

they numbered only a couple of Frenchmen amongst them. There were Danes, Poles, Russians, Swedes and Germans—the latter predominating. There were also one or two women—of the same type as the one who had just entered—and McNiel noticed that all the men (except the two Frenchmen) wore a sort of expectant, restless air.

"Better call for coffee!" Billy suggested.

They sat at a table and gave the order, and the coffee was brought in small, not over-clean cups by a frosty waiter who looked rather like a prize-fighter out of work.

An inner door opened suddenly, and a young Swede came into the room. He walked with a slight swagger, and an expression on his face as he looked round the room which seemed to say: "Well, I've done it, anyway!"

In the doorway behind a small, rather greasy-looking Frenchman stood. He beckoned to one of the girls, and she rose from her table, at the same time helping her companion, who was very drunk, to rise also. She half-led, half-supported him through the door, which closed behind them on a spring.

Through the door to the street another woman entered. She was almost carrying a young, well-dressed man, who, from the look of him was more doped than drunk.

Two things suddenly struck McNiel. One of them was that this *café* did not really exist as such at all—it was just a sort of irregular recruiting-agency for the Foreign Legion! The other thing was that these women were employed to get hold of men, make them drunk or drug them, and then lead them

to the office, like lambs to the slaughter, so that they might be "shanghaied" into the Legion! Plainly a mighty profitable, if nefarious, business was done in this place!

McNiel ran his eye over the assembled company with a new interest. All told, and including Nippo and himself, there were fifteen men in the *café*—all potential recruits for the Legion. The sober ones, without women companions, were plainly joining of their own free-will, but McNiel surmised—with a grim smile at the thought—that some of the others would be sorry for themselves when they sobered up again . . . !

A loud, if somewhat indistinct, voice broke into McNiel's thoughts:

"Hey!" it said. "Wheresh Jacksh . . . ? I wan' my ole pale Jacksh . . . !"

It was the man who had just been brought in. His companion immediately tried to soothe him, and his voice sank to a silly, drunken-sounding mumble. But McNiel was pretty certain he was not drunk. He had been doped—and he was an Englishman!

In his usual manner, McNiel came to a rapid decision. He rose and walked across to the other man's table.

"Hey, you!" he cried, gripping him by the shoulder and shaking him. "What's wrong with you—and what are you up to here?"

He spoke, of course, in English.

The fellow looked up. For a moment he stared at McNiel, trying hard to focus his vision.

"Came here—to—find—pal Jacksh . . . !" he muttered, hazily. "Musht've losht him in *schmozzle*,

somehow . . . ! They tole' me—I shouldsh—fin' 'im 'ere . . . !” He made an effort to pull himself together, shaking his head angrily from side to side. Then he went on: “You're 'nglish? Look after me, will you? Somin' crooked—I've been hocussed, I think . . . !”

The effort was too much, and he slumped into his chair again. The girl sprang to her feet and started to abuse McNiel in voluble French, but he took no notice of her. He picked up a *carafe* of water, and dashed the contents with all his force into the Englishman's face. Some of it splashed the girl, and she screamed a horrible epithet, and, snatching up a table-knife, slashed at McNiel with it.

Quite cool, and without anger, he caught her wrist, and twisted it until she dropped the knife. Then he pushed her into a chair, put his foot on the knife, and turned to the man again.

He knew a trick or two about dope, did McNiel! He took the fellow by the back of the neck, forcing his head down, and pressing hard on certain nerves just behind the ears.

There was some confusion in the restaurant. Several of the other men had got onto their feet, but hesitated to interfere. The girl in the chair, not attempting to get up, was screaming abuse and blasphemies in French. Nippo sat his chair, watching warily, like a cat about to spring. Billy Hull was white as a sheet, trembling like a jelly, and feverishly mopping sweat from his fat, unpleasant-looking face.

The big waiter, who must have been occupied somewhere in the rear, came hurrying forward, and the girl yelled at him;

"Hey, you, Pierre! He interferes, this one! Stick your knife in the *cochon*!"

The waiter, with a threatening air, came up to McNeil, and said:

"M'sieur will be well advised to return to his seat, and make no more trouble! Otherwise . . . !"

McNeil looked at him through narrowed eyes:

"Well, otherwise—what?" he demanded.

"It will be the worse for m'sieur, that is all!"

"See here, *garçon*!" was the cool reply. "This man happens to be a countryman of mine, and he's been hoccussed! I'm going to see him through, and, if you take my advice, you'll lay off, and mind your own business! *Comprenez*?"

The waiter's answer was to make a sudden, catlike spring—with amazing agility—right on to McNeil's back. His long arms went to wind themselves round his neck at the same time. But McNeil was as quick as he was!

In a flash he had bent from the waist until his head almost touched the floor, so that the waiter, somersaulting over it, came to the ground with a reverberating crash which must have shaken him.

Nevertheless he was up in a flash, only to meet a smashing blow full in the face from McNeil's hard, brown fist, which sent him staggering to the further wall, and the blood from his split nose spurting all over the place.

A big Swede, apparently just for love of a fight, took a couple of steps towards McNeil. But he found himself confronted instantly by Nippo, who threw himself into a boxing attitude, dancing lightly and invitingly on his toes the while:

"Lay off, Hans!" Nippo warned him. "One at a time's enough for my pal, so if you muck in, so do I! And then look out for trouble, brother! I ain't the flyweight-champion of the Mile End Road for nothing, let me tell you!"

The Swede laughed scornfully, and made as though to brush the little man aside. Then, as it seemed to him, the whole restaurant broke into pieces, and all the pieces flew at him simultaneously and hit him. Then the world went black, and he knew no more!

Nippo looked contemptuously at the big fellow as he lay, prone and unconscious, against the table his fall had overturned.

"Next gent, please!" called Nippo, in imitation of a London barber. But there were no takers!

Meantime Pierre, the big waiter, had recovered himself, but not his temper. He suddenly whipped a long knife out, and made a rush at McNeil. He was a fearsome looking object as he came, for his face was smothered in blood, through which his eyes and teeth gleamed in the most grotesque fashion. But McNeil was ready for him.

He merely stepped aside, and, timing his blow to perfection, let go a terrific uppercut to the jaw. The unfortunate waiter's head went back with a click, and the blood from his face splattered again as he went down like a pole-axed bullock—and remained where he had fallen!

The young man had now slightly recovered, and was staring around him dazedly:

"Feel better?" McNeil laconically inquired.

"A bit! What's happening?"

"Oh, nothing much! Point is—do you want to join the French Foreign Legion, or not?"

"Good God, no!" gasped the young man.

McNeil caught him by the collar, and hoisted him on to his feet:

"You run like a rabbit, until you see a gendarme—then get him to take you back to your hotel!" he told him. Then he thrust him out of the door, and, turning, put his back against it.

"No one follows that fellow for five minutes, at least!" he announced, eyeing the company grimly.

No one offered to contest this, and no one moved—except the girl who had been with the drugged man. She suddenly snatched up a tumbler, and hurled it at McNeil. But it smashed harmlessly against the wooden lintel of the door.

A moment later the greasy little man re-entered with his last "victim," and stared in goggle-eyed dismay at the scene of carnage. Billy, taking courage now that neither McNeil nor Nippo were near him, hastily jumped to his feet and trotted over to him. He whispered anxiously in his ear. The greasy man considered for a moment, and then nodded.

Billy turned and walked over to Nippo:

"Tell your friend to come through!" he said. "We will get the business settled now!"

A moment or two later the chums found themselves in a small and exceedingly dirty room, the furniture of which consisted of two chairs, and a table covered with dusty and stained green-baize. The room was lighted by a skylight only, and the walls were of matchboarding, lavishly decorated with magazine covers.

The greasy little man, sitting in state at the table, took a sheet of paper, and then looked, not without a suggestion of nervousness, at McNeil:

"You wish to join the *Legion*?" he asked.

"That is correct!" McNeil agreed.

"Your name? Any one will do—you can always change it later if you wish!"

"I'm not ashamed of my own!" said McNeil, acidly.

He gave it, and other particulars, such as age, nationality, etc., which the greasy man asked for.

The latter then favoured him with a long, appraising stare, and wrote down a description of his physical peculiarities on the sheet. Finally he turned it round, and held out a fountain pen.

"If m'sieur will kindly sign there!" he suggested.

McNeil scanned the paper rapidly, and saw that it amounted to an agreement on his part to serve France, in her Foreign Legion, for a period of five years, and to serve in any country and against any foe as directed by his superiors.

He took the pen and signed, with a flourish.

Nippo's turn came next. He answered the questions, and then, taking the pen, signed his name slowly and carefully, as exemplified by his tongue, which protruded from the corner of his mouth all the time.

"What happens next?" McNeil asked.

"M'sieur Hull, here"—Billy had been standing by the door during the progress of this ceremony, looking very much the reverse of comfortable, and, at the mention of his name, started violently—"will conduct you to the recruiting barracks, at Fort St. Jean! From there you will be shipped to Morocco in due course."

"Due course, meaning?"

"Oh, a day or so. It is usually two or three days!"

"Oh!" said McNeil, and shot a glance at Billy that caused him to start trembling again.

As they passed through the restaurant, they saw that one of the girls was seated on the knee of the man she had brought in, and was laughingly persuading him to sign his name at the foot of an attestation form. He was scrawling his signature, obviously too drunk to know what he was doing.

"By God, but this is a lousy business!" McNeil commented, with another glance at Billy. "It's as bad as a crimp's kitchen!"

They walked into the street, and turned towards the harbour. After walking a short distance they turned a corner, and suddenly found themselves confronted by a huge, gloomy pile, surrounded by an old moat.

"That's Fort St. Jean!" Billy Hull informed them, plainly delighted at the prospect of getting them off his hands.

"Blimey!" commented Nippo, regarding the building with an entirely unenthusiastic eye. Then he started to sing, under his breath: "*For ours is an 'appy little 'ome . . .!*"

"But not for long, thank God!" McNeil put in, as they tramped across the old drawbridge, and through the main entrance.

Billy conducted them to the left, and into the guard-room—a dim, musty-smelling apartment which was incredibly filthy—the walls stained with tobacco-laden spittle, and goodness knows what else, and the floor littered with fag-ends, fishbones,

old newspapers, and a miscellaneous assortment of garbage.

"Two recruits, *mon Sergeant!*" Billy announced to the N.C.O. in charge. The Sergeant looked at them with a blase, jaundiced eye, and jerked his thumb at a private:

"Take them upstairs!" he ordered—and returned to the newspaper he had been reading when they entered.

So they bade a curt good-bye to Billy Hull, and followed the soldier up a worn flight of stone steps. As they went McNeil said:

"Well, we're in it now!"

"In it?" breathed Nippo. "I'd say we were, too. Right up to our ankles—only head first!" And, as he mounted, he sang:

*"You're in the Army now—you're in the Army now!
You'll never get rich, you son of a bitch,
You're in the Army now!"*

CHAPTER VII

“BACK IN THE ARMY AGAIN!”

FORT ST. JEAN, that gloomy pile, has a history. At one time it was an integral and important part of the harbour defences, but when it became obsolete it was converted into a combination of recruiting and demobilization barracks, and prison.

It is divided into three floors. The “basement” consisted of greasy, dripping corridors from which open loathsome dungeons, in which the unfortunates of the dreaded *Batallon Correctionnel*, or Penal Battalion were confined before they shipped to Morocco.

The first floor was a barracks for regular French troops, and on this floor also men of the Legion, back from Africa or elsewhere for discharge (there are not a lot of them, for it is estimated that only about five men out of every hundred who join the Legion ever come back to civilization!) were housed. The greatest care was taken that they should not mix with, or even meet, the recruits who had their temporary “home” on the top-floor, where, as in the dungeons, the guard consisted of Senegalese, Arabs, and other French Colonial troops.

The first night spent by McNeil and Nippo in the Foreign Legion was a far from comfortable one!

A batch of recruits had left for Oran that same day, and when the chums arrived, they represented

the full muster of Legion recruits at the Fort. In the early evening a small batch arrived by train, and later on the majority of the men they had seen in "The Red Cow" restaurant that morning, turned in.

Reviewing the company, McNeil found that they numbered in all twenty-five, of whom no less than twelve were Germans, mostly young men. They themselves were the only Britishers, and the balance of the crowd were made up of Swedes, Danes, Belgians, Dutchmen and Russians.

No attempt had been made to do anything with them that day. They just hung about, smoking and talking, and finding time hang very heavily on their hands.

McNeil had a chat to one or two of them, and took occasion to ask after the drunks who had been lured to the restaurant to be shanghied. He was curious, as none of these had turned up in the Fort.

It seemed that they were kept at the restaurant—or elsewhere—locked up and continually doped, until, at the last moment, they were dumped upon a Morocco-bound boat. This was a precaution, in case some of them should cause any real trouble while still within reach of the ordinary amenities of the Law!

McNeil also had a talk to one or two of the soldiers, and learned from them something about the Legion, and life therein. Some of the things he heard were not altogether reassuring!

For instance, he had been given to understand that the pay of a *légionnaire* was five francs per day, and certainly he had received that amount for the

present, his first, day in the service. But this sum, it seemed, was only paid out up to the day of embarkation, and after that the regular scale was adhered to—which was *five sous* per day, paid fortnightly!

Then the *prime*, or bonus, which every recruit was supposed to receive, and which amounted to the comparatively magnificent sum of five hundred francs, was not received by the recruit until about a month after joining, and then only half of it, the balance being paid a couple of months later.

These things were annoying, but did not particularly disturb his equanimity. What did do so was what he was told about the possibility of deserting—for he was assured, with firm conviction, that the chances of deserting from the Legion, and getting away with it, amounted to something like ten thousand to one against!

Desertion, it seemed, was definitely discouraged in the Legion! A large reward was paid to anyone European or native, who brought in a deserter, and quite a number of Berbers and Arabs made a comfortable living by capturing runaways! A deserter was a man with a price on his head so long as he remained in French Morocco, and it followed that the hand of every man was against him!

Furthermore, the punishment for desertion was either death, or about ten years in the Penal Battalion—after which the remainder of the deserter's period of service would still have to be worked out!

This information, which seemed to be perfectly genuine and unexaggerated (and, as a matter of

fact was no more—or less—than the truth) was by no means cheering to the heart of Jimmy McNiel—seeing that he had joined the Legion only with the idea of getting into Morocco and then deserting at the very first opportunity!

However, he refused to be permanently discouraged: he just set his jaw and said to himself that he'd been in tougher places in his time, and had got out of them! He could get out of this one!

Alas! he hardly knew what he was in for as yet!

The batch of recruits remained for three days at Fort St. Jean, they could not be regarded as comfortable days! But the nights were infinitely worse!

They bedded down, all together, in a large, bare, and exceedingly dirty room; a superstructure built on to the roof of the fort, and opening out on to the battlements, where Arab sentries guarded them throughout the night ("Though whether it's to keep someone else out, or to keep *us* in, I'm jiggered if I know!" said Nippo).

After evening *soupe* (all meals in the Legion are described either as *café* or *soupe*) they were marched to a store and issued with their bedding—consisting of small, exceedingly grubby, and very badly filled bags of straw (inaccurately described as *palliasse*) and, that most comic of regular Legion features, *half-a-blanket* each! That was all!

Nippo, in front of Michael in the line, was inclined to be sarcastic:

"Hey!" he ejaculated, holding up his *palliasse* between thumb and forefinger: "Wot abaht this? The blinkin' rats 'ave bin at it, ain't they?"

And then, when he drew his equally grubby piece of blanket:

"Arf a mo', ole cock—as they say in the Blue Pig at 'Oxton—wot abaht the uvver 'arf?"

But he got no satisfaction out of the storeman—only a string of abuse, very terse, and couched in four different languages!

Nippo stepped out of the line, and, eyeing his *palliasse* with some disfavour, gave it a violent shake. Two or three very large, and very fat, brown bugs immediately fell out, and started to race across the floor:

"Blimey!" breathed Nippo. "I blinkin' well thought as much!"

He deftly caught two of the bugs, and, forcing his way back to the half-door of the storeroom, tossed the insects back at the storeman:

"Better 'ave these—I don't want to run away wiv yer blinkin' wife an' family!" he snapped, then walked off feeling more satisfied with himself and as he listened to the strings of blasphemy that followed him from the interior of the store.

"Wot an 'ome from 'ome, ain't it?" was Nippo's comment when they got into the sleeping-room. He gazed round with bitter contempt at the fragments of festering food, old fag-ends, empty packets, and other refuse that littered the floor. He also noted with anything but approval the stains of past expectorations, and worse, that decorated both walls and floor-boards!

McNiel was, by now, an old campaigner. He had slept in all sorts of places, most of them far from comfortable, but he had to admit that his first

night in the Foreign Legion wanted a bit of beating for sheer misery.

The darkness was so dense that it could be almost felt. The air was thick and musty, and impregnated with the smell of dirty flesh, perspiration and the filth left as a legacy by countless recruits who had slept there previously. Then the Germans seemed to go to sleep almost at once, and slept with uncommon noisiness! They coughed, moaned, ground their teeth and sniffed perpetually. Two talked in their sleep. All of them snored at intervals. One man had a most annoying habit. His method of breathing while asleep was to first draw in his breath, noisily, through his nostrils, and then to expel it through his teeth on a long, shrill, whistling note!

While he was striving to get used to this, McNiel became aware of another unpleasantness. The bugs were getting to work, roused to activity, no doubt, by the warmth of his body!

That this was general soon became apparent, for all over the room he could hear the sleepers moving restlessly, while those who were awake fell to scratching with much vigour, and varied profanity. Nippo, next to McNiel, suddenly burst into a string of oaths:

"Cripes!" he growled. "I'm thinking those pacifist-blokes are right when they talk about the cruelty of war! These 'ere blanketty flats are using my carcase as a campaigning ground—diggin' 'emselves in, throwin' up earthworks, an' Gawd knows wot!"

"Here," said McNiel. "Let's see if we can clean 'em up a bit!"

He was the possessor of an electric torch, which

he now produced, and by its light the two of them proceeded to do such execution as they could amongst the filthy insects. But your bug is both clever, and well equipped by nature for his own defence. Unless full of blood (sucked from the veins of its victim) it is very flat, semi-transparent, and amazingly tough—both elusive to catch and hard to kill. Nevertheless the comrades managed to slaughter a couple of dozen or so, and then lay down to try again for the arms of Morpheus.

This time Nippo succeeded, but McNiel, tortured by bug-bites, and half-suffocated by the atmosphere of the room, which was by now becoming appalling, tossed and turned hopelessly.

At last, unable to bear it any longer, he rose and went out on to the battlements, where he lit a cigarette. The Arab sentries, pacing monotonously to and fro, looked at him, but said nothing. Apparently they were used to recruits who could not sleep!

After a few moments a young Swede joined him. He spoke a few words, gruffly, in his own language, but McNiel did not know it. He tried him in French, German, English and Italian, but the Swede was ignorant of all these. So they stood, shoulders miserably hunched against the cold of the night air, leaning against the wall of their "bedroom." Then McNiel noticed that the lad, who was not smoking, was eyeing his cigarette with silent pathos, and offered him one out of the packet. The boy was as pleased as if he'd been given a pound, and thereafter the two unfortunates, puffing at their smokes side by side,

each felt a strange but comforting feeling of comradeship creeping over them.

After a while the Swede gestured a "good-night," and crept back into the room—and, soon after, McNiell, heavy with sleep, followed him.

This time, despite the discomforts, he fell into an uneasy slumber, but it seemed to him he had only been asleep a few minutes when he was awakened by a hellish clangour of bells. He and Nippo both awoke together with a start, and Nippo, with some old recollection of the War clinging to his sleep-clogged brain started to roar, in his best sergeant's voice:

"Stand to, there! Stand to—and jump to it, me lads!"

Certainly the din sounded as though not only the Fort, but the whole of Marseilles itself were on fire, or in some grave danger! But, on investigation, it proved to be only the faithful being called to prayer by the bells of an incredible number of churches!

"Nobody minds 'em doin' a bit o' devil-dodgin' if they want to—but they needn't make so much ruddy row about it!" exclaimed the disgusted Nippo.

An effort to obtain a little further sleep might have been successful eventually, but before it could be brought to fruition the door was opened with a clatter of boots, and a raucous voice started roaring:

"Allez! Allez! Allez! Reveillez! Reveillez!"

While, almost at the same moment, the bugle blared from somewhere below.

"Blimey!" grunted Nippo. "Sounds like a ruddy nursery-rhyme, don't it?"

An Arab orderly brought in a great pail of coffee—greasy, muddy, unpalatable stuff, but which was at least we and warm. Each recruit was dished out with a tin mug full of this delectable liquid, supplemented by a huge hunk of coarse, black bread—and breakfast was over!

After breakfast, the doctor.

McNiel had always been under the impression that the medical inspection for admission to the Legion was the merest farce, and that they were quite ready to take you even if you were dying of cancer or T.B. He was surprised, therefore, to discover that the examination was a most rigorous one, and that none but the fittest men could pass it. Two of their batch were rejected—one for heart and the other for lungs—and went off dejectedly.

"I've got a bad heart for work, a sore tonsil, and two hundred and seventy-eight bug-bites!" Nippo whispered. "I wonder if his nibs will turn me down for that? Blimey, I 'ope so!"

But the M.O. seemed more than satisfied with both of them, and they were passed on to the next stage—their attestation.

McNiel had been more than a little concerned in case he should be called upon to swear an oath that might compel him, should the need arise, to fight against his own country—and this, even for the sake of finding Carol again, he was not prepared to do. He was relieved, therefore, when he found that no oath at all was required—he merely had to sign another form—a sort of confirmation of the temporary one he had signed in the restaurant—to say that he agreed to serve

France, wherever he should be sent, in the Foreign Legion for a period of five years.

"What name do you wish to use in the Legion?" he was asked. "You will have an opportunity of changing it later, if you wish, but it will save time and trouble if you stick to the one from the first!"

"I'll do that, all right!" retorted McNiel. "And I'll use the same one I always have, up to now. My own—James Baird McNiel!"

After he had answered the various questions as to age, nationality and so on, he was passed, alone, into an adjoining office, where a man in a captain's uniform sat at a desk, and regarded him with a keen, but not unkindly, eye, as he stood stiffly to attention in front of him.

The captain glanced at his papers, which had been brought in with him by an orderly:

"Ah, you are English, I see!" he commented, in that language.

"British, sir!" answered McNiel. "I'm a Scotsman!"

The other nodded, and smiled:

"A distinction, no doubt, in your own country!" he commented. "But not here, *mon ami*! Also, in the French Army, we do not use the word 'sir.' You will address your officers as 'mon Capitaine,' or 'mon Lieutenant,' or whatever the case may be!"

"Very good, *mon Capitaine*!" answered McNiel, promptly, and the officer smiled his approval.

"I see," he went on, "that you have joined under what you state is your own name. You will have at least two more opportunities of changing it, if you wish. We do not insist, in the Legion, on soldiers using their own names!"

McNiel frowned for a moment, then answered:

"Pardon, *mon Capitaine*, but you all seem very anxious for me to use an assumed name! I see no reason for this—I am not at all ashamed of my own! No reason to be!"

"*Bon!*" said the Captain. "That is your business. You have seen previous service, haven't you?"

"Yes, *mon Capitaine!*"

"*Bon!* In what army?"

"In two—the British during the War, and that of a South American Republic later!"

The Captain raised his eyebrows and smiled:

"Quite the old soldier, eh? And what rank did you hold?"

"That of a Captain in the British Army, and of a General in the other!"

"Indeed? Any decorations?"

"The V.C., and about twenty South American ones that don't matter a hoot in hell!"

The officer nodded:

"Well, *mon ami*, your past service seems not to have been without distinction! To-day, you are but a private in the Foreign Legion, but I will make a note of your past career on your papers. And now, perhaps it is as well I should explain to you one of two things about your new service which will be of help to you. In the first place, you will probably have heard a lot of terrible stories about the treatment you will receive in the Legion. Let me make it clear to you that the *treatment meted out to you will depend almost entirely on yourself!* The pay is bad, and the life is hard—admitted. But a good soldier—especially one with

the training and experience you have had—should not remain long in the ranks—there is plenty of chance for advancement—and need not have such a bad time. The discipline is hard—even harsh at times—but what would you? You must remember that, while the Legion is world-famous as the hardest-fighting and longest-marching unit in any military organization, it is composed largely of the scum of the earth! The sweepings of gaols, and of the social gutters and cess-pools of the world! Only by the hardest and most rigid discipline can such men be controlled—and most of them are unamenable to discipline. There are, of course, abuses—but these can be dealt with by a man of sense and resource. Do you understand what I mean, McNiel?"

"I follow perfectly, *mon Capitaine!*"

"*Bon!* It is well to remember, also, that I am speaking to you in confidence, and that I do not speak to all recruits like this!"

"I appreciate that, *mon Capitaine!*"

"Very well! I shall follow your career in the Legion with interest, and I feel sure you will shortly earn some distinction, and leave the rank and file behind! As to promotions, the first step is to *premier soldat*—soldier of the first class. Such rank approximates to that of lance-corporal in the British Army. Second step is to Brigadier—equal to full-corporal. Third—*Marechal des Logis*, equal to sergeant. Fourth—*adjudant*—which is the same thing as a British warrant officer. That concludes the non-commissioned ranks. Then follow the commissioned officers—the *sous-lieutenant*, or sub-lieutenant: full-lieutenant, Captain, Major and

Colonel. There are some differences in the non-commissioned ranks as regards the infantry, but as you have joined the cavalry, that does not concern you!"

"Thank you, *mon Capitaine!*"

The other rose, and held out his hand:

"I can see you are a good soldier, *mon ami*, and I am sure you will get on in the Legion. In any case, *bonne chance!*"

If that little interview was designed to make the new légionnaire feel more comfortable in his new surroundings, it hardly had that effect on McNiel. He went out of the office with a decided sense of guilt as to his intentions in regard to the Legion!

The remainder of the time at St. Jean was spent mostly in the usual futile fatigues, and in that everlasting hanging about which is so much a feature of all forms of military service.

On the afternoon of the third day they embarked for Tunis.

Before starting off from the fort, the recruits were lined up and a small, fussy officer, carrying a bundle of "tie-on" labels and an indelible pencil, marched down the line. When he came to McNiel he glanced at a roll he held in his hand:

"Your name is James Baird McNiel?"

"Yes, *mon Lieutenant!*"

"Bon!"

The officer wrote the name, in large block letters, on one of the labels, and then proceeded to tie it very firmly to the lapel-buttonhole of McNiel's jacket.

"That must not be removed, in any circumstances!" he said—and added, drily: "If you

forget your name before you arrive at Tunis, you have only to look at the label!"

Then he passed on to Nippo—who, of course, had quite a lot to say about it:

"Blimey, so it is a school-treat, after all! I hadn't thought it was, not lately! Or are you sending me out as a parcel? If so you might just mark me: 'Fragile—this side up,' will you?"

The officer clearly did not understand what he was saying, but, from the expression on his face, and the faint smile on Mc Niel's, gathered he was "having his leg pulled." He went very red in the face, and snarled:

"Silence, *cochon*!"

Simultaneously, and without warning, he caught Nippo a smart open-handed slap on the cheek.

Knowing his chum, and fearful of what would happen, Mc Niel unobtrusively put his left hand out and gripped Nippo's wrist firmly:

"Steady, lad!" he whispered. "We're not in the British Army now, you know! You'll get about ten years if you hit back!"

The officer had passed contemptuously on, and Nippo glared at him with a murderous gleam in his small eyes, muttering:

"Gawd blimey! If I ever find that cove in civvies . . . !"

A little later the recruits were marched down to the quay, and put aboard an ordinary passenger boat. All the way down they were guarded by an escort of soldiers, with fixed bayonets, in charge of a sergeant.

"Crumbs!" commented Nippo. "Who do they think's going to go for us, anyway?"

McNiel gave a short, and slightly embittered, laugh—he was not enjoying the half-pitying, half-contemptuous glances cast at them by passers-by!

"It's not that, old son! They're afraid some of us might cut and run for it!" he answered.

"Blimey! And I wouldn't be above it, neither!"

"Forget it!" said McNiel. "Those fellows would shoot you down, or stick you like a dog, if you did!"

Nippo sighed, and then gave vent to his first and last complaint as to how he had got where he was:

"Cripes!" he murmured. "But I wish that girl of yours had gone somewhere else than Morocco!"

And McNiel, who was already feeling more than a little guilty about dragging the faithful Nippo into his present position made no answer. Not that he was really responsible, for the little cockney had firmly and resolutely refused to be separated from him.

They marched up a gang-plank on to the boat, and were received by a huge, black-browed, bullying *sergent*—apparently a Russian by birth—and a lieutenant, who hovered, a little nervously, in the rear.

Waving them towards the bow of the vessel, the sergeant scanned each recruit closely as they passed him, and the expression of his face was as that of one who looks upon unpleasant things! His great, thick lips curled back in disgust as each man, shivering away from the malignant expression

in his big, protuberant, blood-shot eyes, hurried to obey the motion of his thick arm.

When McNiel's turn came he neither hurried nor flinched. Instead, he gave the sergeant a steady, unwavering look, straight into the eyes. He said no word, but that look was expressive!

The N.C.O. glared back, but, after a moment, was compelled to drop his eyes. Then he said, in broken English:

"Blooty, Britisher scums, eh? Git forward, son of a pigs!"

At the same moment his heavy hand descended on McNiel's shoulder, giving him a sharp push forward.

The blood surged up into McNiel's face, and for a moment he saw red. But he thought of Carol, and realized that he would have to put up with much of this before his opportunity to get to her came—if it ever did! He walked on, without a word!

But Nippo, who had realized that he must either treat the whole thing as a joke, or qualify for the Penal Battalion by "bashing" some N.C.O. or other, strode daintily past the sergeant, with a grinning: "Hullo, lovely!" and felt he had got a bit of "own-back" for his chum, as he left the Russian grinning and goggling with inarticulate fury, and passed on.

The recruits were quartered on the fo'c'sle of the boat, very near to the bows indeed, and cut off from the rest of the deck by sort of iron hurdles; looking—and feeling—very much like cattle in a pen. They were forced to remain on deck for the whole of the thirty-six hours occupied by the voyage.

McNiel, in the whole of his chequered career, had never felt such utter shame and humiliation—both emotions rather strange to him. The crew looked at them with undisguised contempt, as they hurried past the enclosure about their duties. But worse than this were the passengers, some of whom came and stared at them as though they were some sort of queer, wild animals.

"My God!" thought McNiel. "So this is the glorious, romantic Foreign Legion, is it. . . !"

Then he thought that, every moment, he was getting nearer to Carol and his heart's desire, and he was a little comforted!

CHAPTER VIII

MUTINY!

AS Nippo said afterwards, that voyage looked like trouble from the beginning!

To begin with, all the recruits resented being treated like diseased cattle rather than heroes going to serve *La Belle France* upon the field of battle! Secondly, the majority of them were filled with discontent because they were forced to spend the nights in the open-air. This, as a matter of fact, McNiell found a boon! True, the nights were cold—especially with only that ridiculous half-blanket for covering—but even so it was better than the bug-infested, stinking atmosphere of that dormitory at Fort St. Jean! Then the food was very good—the same, in fact, as that given to the second-class passengers (and there were four classes aboard that boat).

But the main cause of discontent, which rapidly rose to a dangerous height, was the sergeant. His name was Goloukoff, and he was a low-type Russian—and a bully and tyrant of the worst sort.

He had a gift of languages (as most of those engaged in dealing with Legion recruits had), so that he was able to revile each and everyone of the recruits in his own language, adding to his abuse those particular terms of insult and opprobrium most calculated to get under their skins.

Thus, he called the Germans "*schweinhunds*," and McNiel and Nippo "bastards"—and he made the two Italians in the party literally dance with rage by constantly levelling his right hand, with the fist closed except for the first and fourth fingers, which were held stiffly straight, at their faces. This is a sign for averting the "evil-eye," and is regarded by an Italian as the crowning insult of all!

He would strike a man at the slightest provocation—sometimes without any at all—and his method of arousing them in the morning was to make one mad and bull-like rush into the pen, with a roar of "*Allez! Allez! Reveillez!*"—at the same time kicking furiously to right and left with his heavy boots.

The climax came as a result of this, for he broke one of the Swedish boy's ribs while indulging in this pleasant amusement.

The boy was in considerable pain, and did not mind letting everyone know it. The ship's doctor was fetched to him, but did not seem inclined to take much trouble over "an accursed *légionnaire*." The recruits stood around, glowering and sullen, and behind them the three sentries on guard over them scented trouble, and held their bayonetted rifles ready.

The Commandant of Recruits on Transport had been summoned, and now appeared for the first time. He was a coarse, heavy-jowled man, whose bleary eyes suggested a fondness for the bottle.

He looked at the prostrate boy, and the doctor standing beside him, and shrugged his shoulders:

"Leave him be!" he directed. "We shall be in port soon, and he can be attended to there!"

Apparently the purport of this somewhat callous order was understood by the recruits, who had been whispering together for some little while, for a low growl of anger and hatred—an ominous enough sound—came instantly from their lips.

The sergeant, apparently anxious to show off his zeal in front of his superiors, immediately swung round and felled the nearest recruit with a terrible blow from his great fist.

But it was the last blow he was destined ever to strike!

Without so much as a sound a big German, standing just to his left, leapt right on to his back—at the same time whipping out a knife from some hidden pocket. His weight bore the sergeant forward and down, and, even as he fell, the German stabbed him under the arm! Then, as the two reached the deck, the German on top, the latter's arm described a quick sort of half-arc, and from the prostrate sergeant there came a scream of agony. In another instant, even as he kicked and writhed, he was dead! And the German, who had disembowelled him, stood erect and aside, with a satisfied smirk, as if to say: "That's the way to deal with 'em!"

It was early in the morning. There were no passengers about, and no one around save the watch on deck at the time. The sight of blood seemed to inflame the other recruits to a frenzy of action. Two or three of them hurled themselves on the ship's doctor and the two officers, while the rest turned on the three sentries, and, before they

could use their rifles at all, had wrenched the weapons out of their hands, knocked them down, and were trampling them underfoot.

Things looked about as ugly as they well could, when, from the rear of the struggle, a voice rang out :

"Hold on there! Stand still, all of you, and drop those rifles!"

The order was given twice—once in French, and once in German—and it was obeyed. It was given in the tones of one used both to commanding, and to being obeyed—and those who did not recognize the note of command, and obey it instantly, were further persuaded when they turned round and saw that McNiel who had given the order was making patterns over their bodies with the muzzle of a Smith and Wesson 38!

For a moment the scene was "held," as for a picture. And a strange and *bizarre* picture it would certainly have made!

The central figure was that of the prone sergeant, quite dead, with that horrible hole gaping in his belly, and blood smothering the deck around him. Behind him the three officers were held, impotent, in the grip of some of the mutineers. The sentries were squirming and cursing beneath the feet of the others, three of whom held the rifles, and the rest belaying-pins, or any other crude weapon they had managed to grab.

"Drop those rifles!" came the curt order once more, backed by the menace of that revolver-muzzle. The order was obeyed.

"Take this gun—and shoot the first man who moves!" McNiel curtly directed Nippo, who was standing beside him.

"That goes with me!" grinned Nippo, as he took the weapon.

McNiel walked through the group of mutineers, and stood before the Commandant:

"A nasty business, *mon Commandant!*" he commented, tersely.

The Commandant stared at him with bulging eyes:

"Who—what the devil—what's it all about?" he managed to blurt out, at last. "You—you're a recruit too, aren't you?"

"Yes!" answered McNiel, crisply. "But—I'm also an ex-officer, and I don't like mutiny!"

"B-But you've no right to have a revolver!" the Commandant blurted out, with delightful inconsequence.

"Maybe not—but it's lucky for you I had it, isn't it?"

"Ah!" The Commandant drew a deep breath. "Those others! I'll have them shot! I—I'll flay them alive . . . I'll . . . !"

"Just a minute!" put in McNiel. "I said I don't like mutiny—I don't! But also I don't like tyranny—and there's been a bit too much of it here! There's the man really responsible for all this. . . !" He nodded his head at the body of the Russian sergeant. "And now—it had better be forgotten! D'you understand? Anyway, if the whole thing comes out, it might not look too well for you, on an inquiry! That sergeant died—as the result of an unfortunate accident, let us say! And let it go at that!"

"Oh!" gasped the Commandant, a trifle weakly.

"Do you agree?" McNiel pressed him. "If you do—I can stop this nonsense where it is. But if not—I'll just walk away, and take my revolver with me! And that won't be so nice for you, by the look on these fellows' faces!"

"Oh!" gasped the Commandant again. And then, after a short pause: "I agree!"

"On your honour?"

"Oh, decidedly—on my honour!"

"Good!" said McNiel.

He turned his back on the officers, and spoke to the mutineers. Most of them were German, and he spoke in that language:

"You'd better drop it now!" he told them. "If you do, nothing will be done about this! That sergeant is dead, and serve him right—but we've nothing special against the others, have we? And if we carry on"—(it was masterly, the way he identified himself with the men he had just been threatening to shoot!)"—"there can only be one end to it! There's the whole ship's company against us, and, apart from that, we're only an hour or two from Tunis! The officer here has promised to forget the whole matter if we drop it now—so what about it?"

There was a murmur of assent from the mutineers. The fallen sentries were picked up, and even dusted down, by their late antagonists, and the officers were released.

They held a brief consultation, and, as a result the injured boy was lifted and carried off to the ship's hospital, and the sentries were set to the unpleasant task of gathering up and removing the remains of the sergeant.

Breakfast was served, and soon afterwards McNiel was summoned to the cabin of the Commandant:

"Your name is McNiel, is it?" the Commandant asked.

"Yes, *mon Commandant*!"

"And I see here that you have held rank in the British Army, and high rank in South America?"

"That is correct!"

"Well, you have been of good service to me to-day! I should wish to reward you, but I do not see how it can be done unless the whole story is told, and that German murderer punished!"

McNiel smiled, and answered:

"I do not think it advisable, for *anybody's* sake"—and he slightly stressed the word "*anybody*"—"that the story should be told, *mon Commandant*! The sergeant was murdered, but under provocation of the greatest! I advise reporting it officially as an unfortunate accident. As for me, I do not wish any reward!"

"*Bon!* Let it be as you will. Nevertheless, I thank you, *mon ami*! But—I'm afraid I must ask you to give me that revolver of yours!"

McNiel laughed:

"With pleasure, *mon Commandant*! It has served its purpose!" And he drew the weapon from his pocket, and placed it on the table in front of the officer.

"Another thing. We must have that German fellow's knife. Perhaps, in the circumstances, you would get it for us? It might cause more trouble if we tried!"

"Very good—I will go and get it!"

McNiel turned and left the cabin. He went back to the "pen," where he found the German talking volubly to a group of his countrymen. As he approached they turned and stared at him, and their glances were not too friendly.

McNiel went straight up to them, and addressed himself to the big German:

"The officer wants that knife of yours!" he said, in German and without any preamble.

The German grinned—but it was not a pleasant grin. More like a snarl:

"Then why doesn't he come for it himself—instead of sending his sucking-pig!" he returned unpleasantly.

McNiel flushed slightly, then his face paled. He was not pleased:

"What are you getting at?" he demanded, curtly.

"We don't like people who suck up to officers—or spies of the French Government!" replied the German, spitting on the deck.

"Your likes and dislikes do not concern me!" said McNiel. "Give me that knife!"

"And if I don't?"

"You'd better! I've already saved your life once—and I may not do it again, you know!"

The German seemed suddenly to lose his temper.

"Bah!" he ejaculated—and spat in McNiel's face!

The reply was prompt! McNiel's fist shot out, catching him a terrific punch on the jaw. A smaller and less strong man would have gone out for the count, and even the German staggered back until his huge frame brought up against the steel hurdles which formed the "pen."

But McNiel did not wait. He followed him up. Like a flash he was on him again, with a lightning left-and-right to the face, which left a cut lip and a bleeding nose behind them. Then a heavy flush hit to the stomach, and, as the German jerked forward in response to the blow, a terrible upper-cut right to the point of the jaw finished him. He went down like a pole-axed bullock, and lay there, breathing stertorously.

McNiel bent over him and felt for the knife. Found it, and turned away. He paused for a moment to give one long and meaning look at the rest of the Germans, who did not meet his eyes, and then went down to the Commandant's cabin once again.

He knocked at the door, entered, and put the knife on the table without a word.

"So you've got it, then?" said the Commandant.

"Yes, *mon Commandant!*"

"Did you have any trouble to get it?"

"Nothing to speak of!" answered McNiel.

At ten-thirty, precisely thirty-six hours after leaving Marseilles, the vessel drew gently up to the quay at Tunis.

The passengers left the ship first, the *légionnaires* remaining in their pen, guarded by the whole force of six sentries (three of whom looked a trifle the worse for wear) with fixed bayonets.

McNiel looked with curiosity at the busy streets of the town—his first glance at the country in which all the hopes of his life were centred. Though, alas, they seemed to be a long way from the possibility of realization at the moment!

Presently the pen was opened, and, closely

guarded by their sentries, the men were marched along the deck to the gang-plank.

McNiel wondered if the Commandant was going to keep his word, or if he would report the mutiny and the murder of his sergeant. However, there he was standing by the head of the gangway, and he gave McNiel an open smile, and a secret wink, which was reassuring.

At the foot of the gangway the recruits were received by a sergeant and a couple of privates. The sergeant looked on the slightly apprehensive batch of men with distaste:

"*Mon Dieu*—but what a collection of old crocks!" he exclaimed, as he ran his eyes over them. The recruits, not knowing that this was his invariable greeting for newcomers, looked a trifle downcast—for even to those who did not understand his words, their meaning was quite clear from his expression and tone.

A curt order to "Fall in!" was barked at them, and they somehow shambled into the "four-formation" common to most armies. The sergeant stared at them for a moment, and then burst into a howl of rage:

"Fools! Dolts! Idiots! Pigs! You are in a *real* Army, now! Not the wooden soldiers of any other accursed country. . . ! *Mon Dieu*, but I will show you!"

He literally hurled himself amongst them, pushing, cuffing, striking right and left with his cane, and even kicking. Thus, as a drover might handle a herd of cattle, he eventually pushed and punched them into something resembling the "three-formation" so dear to the heart of the Army of France.

After which they were marched out of the harbour and through some dusty, untidy streets, until they came in sight of a large building, protected by high walls and a pair of big, grim iron gates. McNiell was struck by the number of men he could see sitting about on the roof. He learned afterwards that these were Arab prisoners, who were chained there day and night, exposed continually to the blazing heat of the sun by day, and the chill air of the night. From time to time their food (such as it was) was flung to them as though they were dangerous animals, and they spent all their days making those flimsy, canvas-topped, rope-soled shoes, so dear to the Legion.

For this place was the notorious Depot Isoles, better known as "The Torture-Cage," and fully justifying that name! For, as the recruits passed through to the wing apportioned to them, they saw Arabs and other coloured men confined in little cages, like animals. They were filthy, and the stench of them polluted the whole air of the place!

"Gawd blimey!" was Nippo's comment. "If this is being a hero in the French Army, give me a basin-full of being a lag in Dartmoor! It's a seaside health-resort to this dump!"

And he was not far wrong!

As soon as the recruits had arrived, their own clothes were taken from them, and they were served out with slop-suits of the coarsest khaki-drill. They were then marched out of the depot, and put to work with spade, mattock and hoe, in the vegetable and tomato-fields which adjoined it. They soon learned that they were working on

the production of food for the prisoners confined in the depot—a humiliating piece of knowledge!

Life in the depot was not exactly comfortable! The food was bad, the sleeping accommodation, if a little better than that provided at Fort St. Jean, still left much to be desired, and dirt and insect life abounded! They were kept working like slaves in the fields, bossed by military overseers armed with heavy, bull-hide whips, which they were by no means chary of using on anyone who showed signs of slacking!

There were a number of recruits there already when McNiel and Nippo arrived, and more rolled in later. In all they numbered about 150 men, of all imaginable white nations (no coloured men are accepted in the Legion) except British or American, the former nation being represented only by our friends—which made life a little lonely for them.

On the third morning of their sojourn there, trouble broke out once more. In this case the leader was a Russian—plainly an aristocrat, doubtless driven from his country by the revolution. He, and a number of others, bitterly resented the slave-atmosphere of the fields, and also the fact that they were forced to work in order to produce food for the wretched prisoners confined in the cages, and chained to the roof.

During the whole of the previous evening this man and his comrades worked hard to persuade the others to join them in a unanimous protest against these conditions.

They recruited a number of adherents, but, for one reason or another, some fifty of the bunch refused to join in. As for McNiel, his sympathies

were with them, but, reluctantly enough, he refused to join in the protest. He was there, in the Legion, with one object only in mind, and he was not prepared to do anything that would in any way prejudice his chances of success.

Nippo, who was all for a "spot of fun" as he described it, was a trifle caustic on the subject.

"Strike me pink!" was his comment. "You fellows what have got the love-bug give me the belly-ache. It knocks all the guts out of you, so it does! Turns you from real he-men into perishin' poodle dogs, s'welp me if it don't!"

McNiell replied by a tolerant smile. He was prepared to put up with quite a lot from Nippo, who had so faithfully followed him across the world and into this hades of the Foreign Legion, for no earthly reason at all save his regard for him—a fact which McNiell never allowed himself to forget.

"If you like to regard me as a poodle-dog, my dear Nippo," he answered, blandly—using that aristocratic tone which was actually his natural one, and which always had the mixed effect of subtly annoying Nippo, while it made him feel, at the same time, secretly proud that he had a chum who was "a real toff," and who could talk in that way. "If you like to regard me as a poodle-dog, I don't see that I can stop you! It is, after all, *your* point of view! But I did not join the Legion for fun, and I do not feel inclined to handicap myself by getting into any sort of trouble without good reason!"

"What!" protested Nippo, hotly. "Ain't this reason enough, then?"

"I do not think so! After all I—and I daresay you did as well—performed sanitary-fatigues in the British Army without protesting. And this seems to me not much worse!"

"Oh, but that was different!"

"I'm afraid I do not see the difference!" answered McNiel, and from that standpoint he could not be moved.

The following morning when, after *appelle* (roll-call) and coffee, the men fell in for their morning fatigue in the fields, the trouble broke out.

As soon as they were lined up they were served out with tools—spades, rakes or hoes, as the case might be. After which the order to march was given.

But in this case it was only partially obeyed! Some fifty men moved forward—the remaining hundred stood fast!

"*Halte!*"

The N.C.O. in charge was that same sergeant who had received them from the boat. He glared at the rebellious recruits with a face rapidly turning purple, and eyes that seemed liable to pop out of their sockets at any moment:

"What is this?" he roared, at last. "Is it mutiny? Is it rebellion? Or are you just *cafard* . . . ?" He dropped his voice, and his quieter tones were infinitely more menacing than were his louder ones: "Have you never heard the second motto of the Legion, my little ones? The first, as you know, is '*Honour and Fidelity!*' The second, which it seems you do not know, is '*March or Die!*' Now, you can choose which you wish to do! Which is it?"

The Russian aristocrat took a step forward:

"We will not move from here until we have spoken to an officer!" he said, firmly.

The men behind him took up the cry:

"We want an officer! Fetch us an officer!"

The Sergeant turned to a *premier soldat*, and gave him an order in a low tone. The P.S. went off the parade ground at the double, and a moment or two later an *Adjutant* appeared. He received the sergeant's report with every symptom of anger, and then swung round on the mutineers.

But they would not let him speak. At the top of their voices they shouted and bawled:

"*Officier! Officier! Officier . . . !*"

Out through a door an officer appeared, evidently roused to action by the noise. He was wearing a Major's uniform, and was, in fact, the officer in charge of recruits at the depot.

"Silence!" he roared. "Silence, you sons of pigs! *Sacré nom de Dieu!* What is this—a riot!"

The Russian, who had maintained his position in front of the others, answered—in a cultured voice and in perfect French:

"We wished to see you, *mon Commandant*, and they would not let us!"

"Well?" snarled the Major. "Now I am here—what do you want?"

"We refuse to work longer in the fields, like slaves, beaten with whips!" replied the Russian. "We object to our treatment here! We are soldiers—not criminals; men—not dogs! And we demand to be treated as such!"

The officer's face went red, then white. An unholy gleam came into his eyes as he stared at the

Russian. Then he put his hand to his holster, and pulled out his great service revolver.

"So?" he said, between his teeth. "You have ideas it seems, eh? Very well, we will fall in with those ideas! Oh, but most certainly we will! You wish to be treated like *men*, do you? *Nom de Dieu!* After this no one shall be able to say we treated you like women!"

He paused for a moment, and when he spoke again his tone had changed. In his old hectoring, bullying tones, he roared:

"Over to the left wall, there, all men who are willing to obey orders and go to the fields. Over to the left wall!"

The original fifty who had started to march off crossed to the wall. Some did it hastily, their movements betraying their fear of what might happen. Others did it shamefacedly. McNiel walked across with the others, head erect and face set. But his air was that of a man forcing himself to do something against his own will! Nippo walked across sulkily, and he turned to look at the little band of mutineers with an expression almost of longing in his eyes.

"Now, make up your minds!" the officer thundered to the others. "Any more of you?"

After a momentary hesitation, some half-dozen other men left the main body, and, amid the jeers of their comrades, passed over to the wall.

The officer put a whistle to his lips and blew two long blasts.

The effect was almost magical!

The yard in which the men paraded was an enclosed one, with high, sixteen-foot walls entirely

surrounding it. And now, upon the tops of these walls, there appeared soldiers, armed with rifles and machine-guns, which they instantly trained on the little group of mutineers.

"Now!" thundered the Major. "You see that? Oh, you will be treated like *men*—I will see to that! 'March or die,' that's the alternative—which are you going to do?"

The dramatic move had its effect!

At first in ones and twos, and then in groups of half-dozen or more, the mutineers gave in, and walked across to join the others in the shelter of the left-hand wall, until only a little group of stalwarts, about thirty in number, were left. These stood firmly, determined and defiant.

The officer walked right up close to the Russian, who still stood stiffly, a pace or two in advance of the others:

"Will you obey?" the officer hissed at him, thrusting his face close into his own.

"You have heard what I said!" answered the Russian, coldly. "You will not frighten either myself or any of these—*gentlemen*"—he stressed that word, with a glance at the crowd by the wall that made some of them stir uncomfortably—"by your theatricals!"

The officer suddenly lost his temper completely:

"Theatricals, eh?" he screamed. "We will show you, at least, that the play is no comedy! *Cochon*—order those men of yours to cross to the wall!"

"No!" cried the Russian, clearly and loudly.

The officer took a single pace back, slowly levelled his revolver at an arm's length, so that the muzzle

was within an inch of the Russian's face, and then deliberately pulled the trigger!

The response to this act of cold-blooded brutality was immediate!

With a howl of fury, the remaining mutineers made a murderous rush at the officer and the sergeant. The corporal and two premier-class soldiers, who were also on the parade-ground, turned and made a dash through the wicket-gate that was open, slamming it behind them. But the mutineers did not bother with them—their business lay elsewhere!

And then the machine-guns broke out!

For some three minutes the rifles cracked and the machine-guns sputtered. Then they were silent, and the centre of that yard was as horrid a shambles as anyone could wish to see! Some thirty-five men, including the Russian, the officer, and the sergeant lay dead. Even the "loyal" men, who had spread out and crouched for safety against that left-hand wall, had not escaped. One was dead, and two were slightly wounded!

As soon as the firing ceased, the big gates swung open, to admit two other *officiers* and a company of armed soldiers, with fixed bayonets.

Among the survivors, those who had spades were marched, before levelled rifles, out to a bare, sandy patch of ground, and there forced to dig a pit. The others were made to gather up the bodies of their late comrades, and to carry them out of the yard for burial.

After that the officer said a few words. His tone was cold and quite emotionless:

"Recruits!" he said. "You have now seen what

happens to fools who mutiny in the Legion. Let it be a lesson to you! Now—to the fields, and get on with your day's work!"

An N.C.O. barked an order, and the survivors formed up and marched off without a word, walking like men who were dazed. They worked all day in the fields as usual, and there was a double armed guard set over them—but it was noticeable that the overseers carried no whips that day! So it would seem that the sacrifice had not been entirely in vain!

The following day a large batch of the recruits, including McNiel and Nippo Smith, left Tunis for the cavalry training depot at Sousse.

During the whole time they had been at the Depot Isoles they had been strictly confined to barracks, kept more or less under lock and key, and always guarded by armed troops. In fact, they had been treated precisely as though they were convicts.

Their departure was conducted on similar lines.

First their own clothes were given back to them. Then they were paraded in that enclosed courtyard, of fatal memory, where a big, closed van, very much resembling an English Black Maria, awaited them. But before entering it each man was handcuffed by his left hand to a thin, steel chain—and in this guise they were conveyed to the railway station!

And then occurred one of those amazing pieces of sheer incongruousness and illogicality for which the French Army is famous—for, on arrival at the station, their fetters were removed, and they were put into a train—travelling in cattle-trucks which had no doors, and the whole batch—about sixty

men in all—making the journey under the charge of a single corporal!

Every man amongst the recruits had been affected, in one way or another, by the tragedy of that mutiny. Some were angry and full of grumbles ; others were scared and nervy. McNiel was affected more than most, and it made him gloomy, morose, and savage. He would not say a word to anyone, and was ready to strike a blow on the slightest pretext. Nippo was badly concerned for his chum. At first he had been bitterly resentful because McNiel would not join in the mutiny, but by now he had come to realize his point of view, and was prepared to let bygones be bygones. But not so McNiel, who replied to his overtures only by snarling monosyllables.

And so it was that the journey of ninety miles or so up to Sousse was far from being a cheerful one, for all that they were unitedly thankful to have shaken the dust of Tunis, and the torture-cage, off their shoes!

CHAPTER IX

"E. R. RIFF!"

MEANWHILE events were happening many miles away, in the distant, romantic and, even to this day, little known fastnesses of the Riff country, set amid the wild grandeur of the Atlas Mountains which were not to be without their effect upon McNiel's fortunes.

Over the bare and rocky ground a man was walking—or, rather, stumbling—for he was as nearly "all in," as the Americans phrase it, as mattered little. He was a man who had once been tall, but now a stoop—due to a long period of semi-starvation, ill-treatment, and privation—made him look shorter than he really was. Until one looked at the features, partially concealed by a wild, bushy black beard, one might have taken him for a native, for his skin was burned almost black by the sun. But a close glance would have revealed the fact that he was a white man, and, from the contour of his forehead and the expression in his eyes, a man of some intelligence and culture at that.

The hair on his head was dark, though of that curious ashy shade which long exposure to sun sometimes produces. It had also that uneven, stubbly appearance which is the result of having had the scalp continually shaved over a long period.

His clothing was of the slightest, consisting only of a pair of coarse, khaki-drill shorts, and a pair of heavy boots, now, however, worn almost to pieces.

The rest of this man's history was plain, at a glance, to anyone acquainted with Moroccan conditions in those days—for attached to his ankle was a rusted steel chain, the slack end of which he carried in his left hand, while his back was seamed and scored by an intricate mass of old scars, such as could only have been produced by constant and brutal floggings.

A victim of the dreaded Penal Battalion—that hell upon earth to which France was so fond of consigning her soldiers in Morocco upon the slightest provocation, and to the blood and sweat of the members of whom tourists in Morocco to-day owe some of the splendid roads they can travel over.

As the rise in the ground became more definite, this lonely wayfarer found a small patch of shade, cast by a rock, and lay down there for a rest, relaxing his limbs, and breathing deeply and regularly, as one who not only wants to get the most out of a brief period of relaxation, but also knows just how to do it.

After awhile he rose, and commenced to push on—a little quicker now than before. Haste was necessary enough, for he knew that, a few miles further on, he would be in a country where it was practically impossible for cavalry to operate—and, at the moment, it was cavalry he was frightened of.

A couple of weeks before he had been, with a number of other unfortunates, helping to build an

outpost which was, up to then, the most extended permanent station of the French Army, lying between Taza and the edge of the Atlas Mountains. Working there, goaded continually by the whip, half-starved, and even more actively tortured on the slightest provocation, this man had seen the opportunity he had been waiting for for five long years—and he had taken it. His escape had entailed the killing of two Senegalese guards—the loathed *Goubis*—with his bare hands, and this he had done!

He had known when he had done it that his chances of escape were something like a thousand to one against, but he had rather corrected those odds by making his way in precisely the opposite direction to that which his would-be captors would imagine—that is, toward the Riff country, instead of towards the Spanish border. He did this not only to delude his pursuers, but also as an integral part of a scheme he had had in mind for a long time—almost, in fact, since Ab-del-Krim had taken over the chieftainship of the Riff, and had flung the gauntlet defiantly in the face of France.

Now, as the attainment of at any rate the first part of his object drew nearer and nearer to his hand, the man grew more and more nervous of pursuit. By this time they would be pretty sure he had not made for the Spanish frontier, and they might be looking for him in this direction, thinking, maybe, that he had lost his sense of direction. They would hardly dream he would be making deliberately for the Riff country, where white men were tortured in ways which made the blood run cold. . . .

A sudden sound from behind made him start, so that he appeared to almost leap from the ground. It was a human voice—raised in a shout. The first human voice he had heard for many days . . . !

He turned to look, and, as he did so, his heart turned to water within him. For that shout had been a "view-halloo"—and there, behind him, bending to the necks of their horses to urge them to their greatest speed, rode five men in the unmistakable and bitterly hated uniform of the French Foreign Legion!

He was captured! He would be dragged back to that hell again, and there, after numberless tortures, he would probably be flogged to death, as an example to other desperate prisoners to show them that they must not murder their guards, even if they were *Goubis*!

He had decided that he would never allow himself to be recaptured. He would kill himself first! But now he was faced by the fact that he had no means by which to commit suicide! He had no weapon, and there was no water into which he could fling himself to drown, and no precipice over which he could hurl himself to a welcome death!

His brain worked rapidly, while he stood there as though turned to stone. His one hope was to offer such resistance that they might shoot him out of hand to save themselves further trouble!

A quick glance round showed him a couple of rocks, set close together, which would make an admirable natural defence against attack by mounted men. He turned, and ran swiftly towards

it. No great need to save his strength now—he had come to the end of his journey!

The oncoming soldiers shouted again as they saw him run, and turned their horses a little to cut him off. But he reached his objective long before they were upon him.

He bent, and hastily gathered some small stones—rough fragments of rock, sharp as razors where the rough edges were. Then, from inside the waistband of his tattered shorts he produced a rough sling. A foolish enough looking weapon, but he was practised with it, for it had provided him with most of the scant food he had had since his escape!

As the men rode towards him, shouting to him that it was all up, and he had better surrender quietly, the fugitive grimly fitted one of the small pieces of rock into his sling. Then, when they got near enough, he swung the sling and sent a stone whizzing through the air. The aim was good, for the stone hit one of the *légionnaires* square between the eyes, and brought him crashing from his horse.

The others pulled up, startled by this unexpected happening. They had thought they were dealing with an unarmed, half-starved and exhausted man—but it seemed it was not so!

Even as they paused, another stone came whizzing, and all but broke the wrist of a second *légionnaire*. Then the Brigadier in charge of the party gave his orders:

“Dismount! Spread out—surround him, and work in on him. There’s plenty of cover!”

A couple more stones came flying at them as they executed this manœuvre, but did no damage. Behind that rock the man crouched with a light of

gladness in his eye! This, after all, was better than being taken tamely, and if it could only end in his death, all would be well . . .!

And then, as he saw what his pursuers were up to, a new thought came to him. *There was yet a chance of escape!*

They were leaving the horses by the prostrate man. If he waited until they had worked in fairly close, and then made a dash for it, risking the bullets, he *might* be able to mount one horse, drive the rest off, and then . . .!

In his excited enthusiasm at this idea he let out a wild whoop of defiance, and catching a glimpse of the Brigadier as he moved from one rock to another, sent a stone whistling past his ear with gusto.

Slowly the *légionnaires* closed in on their quarry from four different quarters—and every time he got a reasonable chance, he sent a stone whizzing at them. All were so closely absorbed in their own affairs that none of them noticed the dark heads, with hawk-like noses and fiercely gleaming eyes which sometimes, for a split-second, showed from behind the further rocks and boulders!

At last the runaway saw his chance—and, in a flash, he took it. Like a rabbit bursting from its burrow he suddenly shot out from behind his rock, and dashed—a dark, flying streak, for the horses! The Brigadier was nearest, and he sprang out to meet him. But the running man did an unexpected thing—instead of hurling a piece of rock, or striking out with his fists, he charged the soldier as a footballer might, and sent him rolling over and over on the rocky ground, while his carbine exploded harmlessly in the air. The fugitive raced on,

It was the horses that actually beat him. His rush at them scared them, and caused them to rear and lash out—and so it was that before he could get even one of them loose, the other three *légionnaires* were upon him, with the winded Brigadier hastening up from the rear as fast as he could.

Even then he put up a good fight. He punched, kicked, bit and clawed, so that, before they managed to pin him down and lash hands and feet together, there was not one of them that did not bear signs of his handiwork! But the poor wretch collapsed like a pricked bubble when he was finally secured. He lay there, panting heavily for breath, and with big sobs choking in his throat, and great tears running down his leathery cheeks. The thought that he had been so near to new life and liberty, and that now, after all, he was to be dragged back to be tortured and killed was too much for him!

The Brigadier, looking down at him, made some ribald remark as he drove the toe of his heavy boot into the prostrate man's ribs, eliciting a moan, more of sheer misery than of pain.

Then one of the troopers slung the bound man, like a sack, over the pommel of his saddle, and the man who had been struck down by the first stone was thrown across his own horse and strapped there.

The *légionnaires* mounted, and the Brigadier gave the word to start, which sounded in the ears of the bound man like the first note of his death-knell.

And then, even as they wheeled their horses, the whole situation was completely changed!

There came a sputtering volley, all the rocks around them seeming to spit fire simultaneously! The Brigadier gave vent to a sharp cry, and came toppling out of his saddle, while the man riding the horse which also carried the prisoner choked, and then collapsed forward, across his body—which probably saved his life!

For there came another sputter of fire. The two remaining *légionnaires*, who had reined in their horses and, carbine in hand, were staring about them to find some mark to aim at, were both hit. One crashed out of his saddle, while the other, wounded but not disabled, put spurs to his horse and dashed madly off, in a vain effort to escape.

Vain, because almost immediately a tall figure emerged from behind a rock, and stood, for a moment, looking after the flying man. Then it raised a long-barrelled gun, took careful aim, and fired. The distant horseman threw his arms up in the air, stood straight up in his stirrups for a second or so, and then crashed sideways from his horse. One foot slipped through the stirrup iron, and so he was dragged along, with the hooves of his horse making a bloody mush of his head.

A couple of dark-skinned riders emerged from concealment, and went galloping off after the flying horse, which they soon captured.

Now these men, tall and lean, with long, ragged dark hair, thin, hawk-like noses, and clad in nothing much except a blanket (usually a French army one) swarmed out from behind the surrounding rocks. There were about fifty of them, fierce-looking fellows, all armed with rifles and knives. It was

noticeable that almost all the rifles were of the modern, magazine type.

They ran, lustily shouting their triumph and thanks to Allah as they went, over to the fallen men. They were all dead, but eager hands tore the clothing off their bodies, and then knives flashed in the air, performing those horrific mutilations which, although they inspire such horror in the Western mind, are really only ancient and honoured tribal customs, and pretty general throughout all the races of the East.

A fresh yell of triumph arose as they dragged the bound man, alive and unhurt, from the horse upon which he had been thrown. Once again knives flashed in the air, but, before they could do their fell work, the movements of their owners were checked by a loud, raucous authoritative voice:

"Hold, fools and sons of fools! Saw ye not that that man was an enemy of the French, whom may Allah curse? Is it for us to slay those who are the enemies of the Infidel, and therefore must be friends to us? Hold, then, lest Allah in his great wisdom strike ye dead where ye stand!"

The speaker looked, at first glance, like any of the others, except that his clothing was richer and his arms better. A first glance would have told the intelligent observer that the man was a chief—a second would have revealed the amazing fact that he was a Westerner. For his hair and beard were of a lighter shade, and the latter was cut differently. Also his skin was lighter, and his features unmistakably European.

The wild tribesmen, who were his followers fell back, looking a trifle shamefaced as this individual

strode past them and stood gazing down at the prisoner as he lay, prostrate and bound, on the ground at his feet. Then he spoke, in French:

"Are you a Frenchman?"

The other shook his head, with feeble emphasis.

"Then what are you—of what nationality? You understand French, I see!"

The man, by way of answer, opened his cracked lips, and showed his black and swollen tongue, which would not allow him to speak:

"Give him water—a little, and slowly!" the Chief ordered, curtly.

The order was obeyed, and, after a few minutes, the poor wretch was able to speak in a husky whisper. He used the bastard French common in the Legion:

"I am an American!" he explained, slowly and laboriously, "I was in the Penal Battalion, and I escaped! I wanted to find Ab-del-Krim—I have information of value for him!"

To the amazement of the prisoner, and also to his men, who had, apparently, not heard him do it before, the Chief replied in English:

"Well, I'll be gol'-darned! Say, brother, I'm from God's Own Country myself—a Britisher by birth, but American by adoption. I guess you've fallen into the right hands, this time!"

"Thank God for that!" said the prisoner—and incontinently fainted. The strain, both physical and nervous, of the last hour or so had been too much for him.

The Chief turned round, and roared in Arabic:

"Aruk! Aruk—come hither!"

"Yes, Lord?"

A huge Riff shouldered his way through his comrades, and saluted the Chief, who pointed to the prostrate man.

"Untie him, and then, if thou canst, strike off that chain. Thereafter, see that he is attended to, and is borne with us in comfort. On thy head be it, Aruk!"

"Thy will, and that of Allah, be done, Lord!" answered the giant, piously, and got to work.

Further up in the hills, amid a pleasant vista of grain-fields and fruit-orchards, a great gathering of men stood listening to the words of one who, standing on the saddle of his horse, spoke with the enthusiasm and fire of a fanatic. He was a man of magnetic personality, plainly dressed, but quite obviously a Chieftain of more than usual importance, and behind him his body-guard—a dozen tall, fierce-looking Riffs—leaned on the long barrels of their ornately ornamented native rifles while he spoke.

He was nearing his peroration, and, though he spoke without the vivid gesturing and the almost foaming excitement of the average native speaker, yet his words bit right into the hearts of his hearers, who stood spellbound:

"There are those of you," he was saying, "who have been down into the valleys, and who have fought with the armies of the French. These men will bear me out! *It is not only the French we are fighting—it is the world!* For many of these men who come against us in the name of France, are not French at all! You will find amongst them men from England, Germany, Austria, Italy, Denmark, Sweden and Russia. Aye, and even from America—

besides which there are yellow men from the East, and negroes from other parts of Africa! The French have spread their lies over the whole world, and the infidels of the world have sent their cohorts to help the French, as they did against the great Sal-ed-Din, in the days of old! Therefore, O my brothers and my friends, I am crying a Holy War. It is not merely in the cause of the Riffs we are called upon to fight—not merely to save our own fields and vineyards. We are called upon to fight the cause of Allah, and to save the True Faith from desecration and destruction at the hands of the Infidel! *Allah calls for blood*, my children—shall we, who are of the true faith, let him call in vain?"

The man paused, breathless, and waited the response. It came in a wild burst of noise and shouting—and then a very old man stepped out in front of the crowd, and reduced them to silence with a single wave of his hand. Then he addressed himself to the speaker:

"Truly," he said, "thou speakest words of wisdom and truth, and I think that the Spirit of Allah dwells within thee, O Ab-del-Krim! Furthermore, I can bear witness myself to the truth of what thou hast said, for I have seen these foreign Infidels of all nations joining together under the flag of France, and have heard them speak in many tongues. To-morrow, two-thirds of my men, the youngest and strongest, shall be assembled and sent to wherever thou wilt. Since Allah has called for blood, He shall not call in vain!"

"In the name of Allah, I thank thee, O Ramka!" responded the Chief, gravely. Then, raising his

voice that all might hear, he went on: "Verily, thou hast chosen well—for those of thy children who perish in the struggle will be taken straight to the arms of Allah, and those who survive to see victory will carry their heads forever high, for that they struck strong blows in the great cause of Faith! For that victory shall be ours there is no doubt! I will quote to thee the words of a warrior far greater than I can ever hope to be—El Mansur, the Victorious—when, many generations ago, he flung his defiance in the teeth of the King of Spain. He said: 'Thus saith the Omnipotent Allah, I will turn against them, and will make of them the dust of desolation by armies which they have not seen; neither shall they be able to turn aside or escape from the same. I will cast them into the depths of the abyss, and bring them to nothing!' Thus spake El Mansur, many years ago, in the name of Allah, the All-Powerful—and thus again speak I to-day, in his Blessed Name! I say that victory shall be ours!"

And the old man, bowing his white head, answered in a deep tone: "*Bismillah!*" ("As God pleases!") while the crowd of listeners burst into loud and enthusiastic cheers, and cries of praise to Allah the All-Blessed, and to Ab-del-Krim, who was his appointed servant to lead them to victory!

"Let your men march to-morrow night," Krim directed the old Chief, crisply. "Arm them as best you can—the gaps we will fill when they arrive at the Secret City. Thanks to Allah, and to our friend the Chieftain Roy-es-Stone, there is no lack of rifles!"

The old Chief bowed his acquiescence, and Krim, having blessed the assembly in the name of Allah, the All-Generous and All-Merciful, descended from his perch, mounted, and rode away with his escort.

Just outside the narrow cave, or natural tunnel, which led to the almost impregnable Secret City which was the headquarters of the Chief Roy-es-Stone, there rose a tall, spire-like pinnacle of rock, on the very top of which there was a small ledge which formed a comfortable natural seat. On this there sat a strangely incongruous figure—incongruous, that is, in those wild and sombre surroundings, where civilization had never penetrated, and where nature reigned supreme.

This was nothing less than what was, apparently, a young man, and a European at that. He was tall and slender, and was dressed as might one who was going for his morning ride in Hyde Park—smartly cut riding-breeches and jacket of khaki-drill, with knee-boots and a bright yellow silk shirt. He was a singularly young, and effeminate-looking youth, this, with his big, lustrous dark eyes looking out from under the shade of his *solar-topee*, which shaded a skin whose soft, ivory pallor was unravaged by the sun. Hands and feet, too, were singularly small and delicate for any young man, and especially so in the case of one who had thus dared to penetrate where hardly any white men had ever been.

Yet there he sat, this youth, gazing anxiously over such view as he had of the steep, wild, rocky slopes of the Atlas mountains, while his small, wiry mountain pony cropped contentedly enough

at the un-nourishing moss which grew around the foot of the pinnacle.

Presently the young man saw something, for he registered attention, and then, as he peered over the mountain side, his dark eyes shaded by his slim hand, satisfaction.

He swung himself off the ledge, and, with the ease and agility of a mountain-goat, he descended the steep side of the pinnacle. He paused for a moment at the bottom, to adjust his garments with almost feminine finickiness, and to settle the leather belt, from which depended a workman-like revolver in a leather holster, about his very slender waist.

He mounted his little pony, and turned it towards the entrance of the tunnel, and, as he entered its murky length, he said to the dark forms that, leaning on their rifles, were grouped about it,

"Roy-es-Stone is coming, with his men. I think they have had victory!"

"*Mashallah!*" ("As God has pleased!") answered a deep voice from the darkness, and the youth passed on.

About the centre of the tunnel there arose a great barrier, hand-made of enormous pieces of rock, welded together by a sort of mortar, made of mud, clay and powdered rock, so thick and strong that nothing but heavy artillery could have destroyed it. At either side there was a narrow opening—just wide enough for a man, mounted or afoot, to pass through—and no wider. And even here a barrier was raised, a foot from the ground, which required to be carefully stepped over, or disaster would result. It was an amazingly strong place—

a dozen men, with sufficient rations and ammunition, could have held it indefinitely against a whole army corps. Here were more sentries, and again the youth passed the news of the approaching band.

Through the tunnel, and in daylight once more, the Secret City was revealed, nestling picturesquely on the curiously green and fertile slopes of a deep valley, entirely enclosed by walls of natural rock which towered up for hundreds of feet on every side, and yet sloped back in such a way that, for most of the day, the sun shone right into the valley. These walls were smooth and quite unclimbable, nor were the peaks above accessible, from the outside, to any but the boldest climbers, who, even then, could only ascend with great difficulty, and one at a time.

The city itself was composed firstly of a large number of native mud-huts, secondly of a collection of low, barrack-like buildings, plus one or two larger and more elaborate erections and, strangest of all, a little wooden cottage, built more or less in the conventional English style, and with a dainty little flower-garden in front, enclosed in a rustic wooden railing!

It was towards this that the youth rode, and it was just outside the gate of the cottage that he waited, until, presently, a string of figures, riding their wiry mountain ponies, emerged from the tunnel in single file. They were wild, fierce-looking men, each carrying his rifle, and some of them with ghastly, ensanguined trophies hanging from their saddle-bows, which made the youth turn his gaze aside and shudder involuntarily.

The man who rode at the head of the file turned, gave some instructions to his immediate follower, apparently his lieutenant, and then, turning his pony, galloped at speed over the intervening ground towards the cottage, waving his rifle in the air as he came.

When, finally, he reined his pony back on its haunches and slid deftly from the saddle, the youth's greeting was a somewhat strange one:

"Hello, Daddie, darling—back at last then!"

"Aye, and safely too, my love!"

They spoke in English, and the incongruity of the scene reached its climax when the two apparent men embraced and kissed each other!

"Any casualties, Daddie?"

"Nary one, my dear! But O, I've got a real wonderful surprise for you! Something that'll just gladden that little heart of yours no end!"

The effect of this speech on the "youth" was remarkable. The blood drained suddenly from her cheeks, her whole body became tense and she caught her breath in a little gasp. Her father frowned:

"No, not what you think, my dear—and I wish to God you'd get that damned *poluka* out of your mind! Your chances of ever seeing *him* again are about as good as those of a snowball in hell, and that's *that*! No, this is what I've got for you . . .!"

And he pointed back to where the gigantic Aruk and another Riff were aiding the weak and halting steps of a tall, lean man, with a scarred body and tattered shorts, towards the cottage.

"An American, my dear—a refugee from the French Penal Battalion! We came on the spot

just as they captured him, and wiped 'em out! He's an enemy of France, that guy—so that means he's a friend of ours! But the great thing is—he's a doctor! So now that hospital of yours will be properly equipped, and our Riff pardners who get shot up will stand a good chance of recovery! Not but what you do your best, my dear, I know—but experience and knowledge count for something, when it comes to medicine and surgery!"

"Oh, Dad—how wonderful . . . !"

And that was just what the refugee said when, in the "sitting-room" of the little cottage—in which, despite the obvious difficulties, the English atmosphere was as strongly exemplified as it was outside—the man who had once been Cappy Royston, gun-runner, and now was Roy-es-Stone, a chieftain of the Riffs—performed the introductions with a whimsical smile:

"Say, Doc. Norton," he said, "meet my daughter, Carol, will you? I guess she's just tickled to death to see you, because she runs the hospital here—of which she's house-surgeon, matron, and probationer nurse, all in one! There are no instruments, and no medicines worth talking about, but she does manage to patch up an occasional case successfully, for all that!"

And Carol, looking at the newcomer with shining eyes, said softly:

"I think God must have sent you, Doctor! I have prayed so often for some real help in nursing these poor fellows!"

"God is a good word!" responded the Doctor, in deep, vibrant tones. "I feel at the moment that I am in Heaven—or Fairyland! To find, in a place

like this, and after years of torture and brutality, an English cottage, with an English sitting-room, and an English lady in it—well, it does savour of magic, doesn't it?"

Carol Royston blushed a little, as she answered:

"I'm afraid I hardly look the English lady, Doctor. You see, I am supposed to be a young man here. The *son* of Roy-es-Stone, not his daughter. Father thought it would be better—safer . . . that way! Anyway, we're just as glad to have you, as you are to be here, I'm sure of that!"

Norton laughed.

"Maybe—but it sounds impossible! Anyway, it's fine to be here!"

It was later on, when Royston was out of the way, and the newcomer had bathed, fed, and was looking more human in native garb than he had in his own, that Carol managed to put the question that had been burning on the edge of her tongue for so long.

"You were in the Foreign Legion, Doctor, weren't you?"

"My God, I was!" answered the Doctor, with feeling.

"Tell me—did you ever meet anywhere in Morocco a man named McNiel—Jimmy McNiel? A young man, but looking older than his age, and——!" She went into an intimate, and somewhat flattering, description of the appearance of McNiel, to which the Doctor listened with close attention.

But when it was finished he reluctantly shook his head:

"No, I'm afraid I never struck him! But then,

you see, I have been nearly two years in that cursed Penal Battalion . . . !"

Carol sighed:

"Ah, then you could hardly have met him!"

"Hardly!" said Norton, grimly. "The social side of the Penal Battalion was not very highly organised!" Then, his bitter tone changing to one of kindly interest, he asked: "Someone you are fond of, eh?"

"My *fiancé*!" she answered, with a pretty touch of pride. "We left him somewhere in South America, but I am perfectly certain that he will follow me here—or try to!"

The Doctor thought for a moment. Then he remarked:

"Well, he'll find one thing pretty soon—and that is that if he wants to get anywhere near you here, the only way he can possibly do it is by joining the Foreign Legion—and it's about a hundred to one that's just what he'll do! Now, it looks as though by a lucky chance, I may be instrumental in helping to bring you two young things together once more—and if that is so I shall feel highly privileged!"

"That's very sweet of you!" commented Carol. "But what exactly do you mean?"

"Why, when I made a break for old Krim's country I had no intention of acting as doctor for his troops—though I'm real glad to be able to do it. But I wanted to put up a scheme to him, which, in brief, is this. Owing to the brutal treatment meted out by the French to their men of the Foreign Legion they are fostering, in that unit, a terrific individual hate against France. There is hardly a man in the Legion who isn't anxious to desert—

and if, having done so, they could strike a blow at the French, most of 'em would howl with joy at the idea! I suggest a scheme by which such men may be aided to escape from the Legion, brought here, and used as part of Krim's fighting forces—in other words, I am suggesting that Krim shall organize his own Foreign Legion, taking advantage of the training France has already given the men! What d'you think of that?"

"Why," breathed Carol, with a light in her eyes, "I think it's just wonderful! Have you told Daddy about it yet?"

"Not yet—I've hardly had time!"

"Well, you tell him all about it this evening—and then I'll see to it that he puts it before Ab-del-Krim right away!" said Carol, with determination in her voice.

And that evening, the scheme having duly been explained to Royston, and approved of by him, Carol went to bed in a happier mood than she had done for many months. For, for some reason, she felt definitely nearer to her long-lost lover; fantastic as it might seem, she felt that Norton spoke prophetically when he talked of Jim joining the Legion.

CHAPTER X

WAR IN THE DESERT!

McNIEL found Sousse a great improvement upon Tunis. From the very beginning that prison-atmosphere which had been so trying in the Depot Isoles disappeared.

To begin with, the recruits, having received the lavish sum of five francs (flat rate) for their "civvies," were issued with their uniforms on the first day, and thereafter, as soon as the day's work was over, there was no difficulty in getting passes into the town.

This was an inestimable boon to McNiel. He found that in the town of Sousse a *légionnaire* was regarded as something little better than a criminal, or even a leper (for a *légionnaire* to speak to a white woman was a punishable crime!) but this irked him little. He was at last able to prosecute some inquiries as to the possible whereabouts and fortune of Royston and his daughter. He had no success whatever in this effort at first, but still it was something to be free, for an hour or two every day, to hang about listening to gossip and stories from the fighting-zone, and to pursue his inquiries in a more active manner when possible.

Training, apart from the climate, was child's play to both McNiel and Nippo. They were expert riders and crack shots, both of them, so the riding and musketry schools were soon things of the past for

them, and once they got used to the unaccustomed "three-formation" peculiar to the French Army, the rest was easy.

In their first month at Sousse they were both attached to the Third Regiment of Cavalry, and two days after this happened both of them were ordered to report to the Commandant.

They did so, wondering what they had done wrong. McNiell went in first, and was surprised to note that the Commandant, a rather sour and grim-looking individual, eyed him up and down with obvious signs of approval. Then he glanced at the papers before him, which McNiell recognized as his *dossier*.

"*Légionnaire* McNiell?" asked the Commandant.

"*Oui, mon Commandant!*"

"You have been a bare five weeks in the Legion, is that so?"

"That is correct!"

"H'm! I have been looking over the reports of your training—they are remarkable, I find! They are explained, however, by a note I see here on your history sheet, to the effect that you have served previously in two armies, holding rank in both, and a high rank in one of them. Is that so?"

"Yes, *mon Commandant!*"

"*Bon!* I notice, also, that you have seen service in several campaigns?"

"That is right, *mon Commandant*—if revolutions in South America are to be counted as campaigns!"

"Well, they are certainly fighting!" said the Commandant, with a slight smile. "You were also in the Great War, I suppose?"

"Yes, *mon Commandant!*"

"*Bon!* Now, your instructors report that there is nothing more they can teach you. Apart from actual experience in the campaign, you may be regarded as a fully-trained soldier. Now, are you willing to volunteer for the fighting-line quite soon?"

"*Mon Commandant*, I will volunteer immediately if you wish!"

Luckily the Commandant was not aware of the real reason behind the eagerness which was so obvious in Mc Niel's tone and manner, and so that eagerness pleased him! Here, he told himself, was a man likely to be worthy of the Legion, and a credit to its best traditions!

He leaned forward, and said, with a sudden friendliness in his tone:

"And how do you find life in the Legion, *mon enfant?* "

Mc Niel was a trifle nonplussed for the moment! Quite plainly he had scored something of a hit with this rather tough looking *officier*—and if he told the truth now, he was likely to completely eliminate that impression!

So he fenced skilfully. He shrugged his shoulders, and answered:

"One does not look for a bed of roses, when one goes campaigning, *mon Commandant!*"

The Commandant was more pleased than ever! Here, he told himself, was no grumbling malcontent—but a real soldier—a campaigner prepared to take the rough with the smooth in a philosophical spirit.

"*Bon!*" he ejaculated, with infinite satisfaction. "And you are anxious to get to grips with the Riff, *n'est-ce pas?* "

"Indeed, yes, *mon Commandant!*" And once again the earnestness and sincerity of the reply greatly impressed the officer—he not knowing the real reason for it!

"Well, Mc Niel," he said, after a moment's consideration. "It seems to me that you are likely to go far in the Legion, if you behave yourself. And I am pleased to inform you that you are about to take the first step in that direction now. We are short of *sous-officiers* in the fighting-zone, and so I am promoting you to Brigadier, straight away—an unusual step, but justified, I feel sure, in your case! The promotion will appear in orders tomorrow, and you will take up your new rank immediately. You will be drafted up country in the course of a few days!"

And the thanks he received were so obviously sincere that yet again the Commandant was delighted!

As he went out of the room Mc Niel managed to whisper to Nippo, waiting outside (the cloud between the two chums, caused by the mutiny at Tunis, had now completely blown over):

"You love the Legion, and you want nothing better than to get at the Riff. Don't forget!"

Nippo didn't—with the result that he also left the Commandant's presence a promoted man—in his case to Premier Class Soldier.

So both the chums, just as they were getting used to being bullied, and even struck, at times, now found themselves in the position of being able to bully and strike themselves—as well as having the power to relegate men summarily to the cells for any offence they thought merited it!

Three days later they found themselves, with a draft of reinforcements, on the road to Saida. On the road literally, for they marched up, though they might well have gone by train—probably the idea was to break them into marching conditions before they actually got into the fighting zone.

Again in Saida McNiel strove hard to get news of Royston, and again he failed. But they did not remain there long, for less than a week after their arrival, the two chums were off again, this time to Meknes, *via* Marrakesh (the capital of Morocco) as part of a full squadron of reinforcements for the Third Regiment, then campaigning in the desert country between Meknes, Fez and Taza.

Their new positions of authority made things a little easier for the chums. Apart from anything else, their rank, in each case, carried extra pay. Also, at Saida they received the first instalment of their *prime*, or bonus for joining, consisting of the comparative fortune of 250 francs.

Nippo spent most of his freely on extra food and drink—until he realized that McNiel was hanging on to his, thinking it might be useful in his search for Carol. Then, rather shamefacedly he offered his chum all he had left of it, to swell his little hoard. McNiel resolutely refused to take the money, however, although touched by the offer.

It was between Marrakesh and Meknes that they had their first taste of the Riff quality. They were marching through a patch of rocky country, along a slightly sunken road, bordered on either side by trees—the sort of country admirably suited for an ambushing enemy.

The usual order went forth:

"Chantez, légionnaires, chantez !"

A squadron of Legion cavalry consists of 480 men, and so the noise they made as they lifted their voices together in one of the Legion marching-songs was by no means inconsiderable!

McNiell was just thinking to himself: "Well, if this isn't rag-time campaigning, I don't know what is! If any of the enemy are within a couple of miles, they'll be wise to us as hell!" when the thing happened!

There came a sudden rattle of rifle fire from the trees on either side of the road. The fire was concentrated on the front ranks of the column, and, unluckily, the first man to get his packet was the Captain commanding the squadron. With him four other men, and two horses were dropped, and the ranks immediately following them stumbled over the bodies, and were thrown into instant confusion.

The Lieutenant, now in command, was an inexperienced soldier and gave a ridiculous order—that the men should divide, and set their horses at the steep, rocky banks on either side of the road.

The order was obeyed—and immediately confusion became doubly confused! Two-thirds of the horses could not manage the steep, slippery slopes which formed the edges of the road. Many of them fell, and got mixed up inextricably with those pressing on behind. The one or two men who did gain the upper level were almost instantly shot down!

The Rifles had not hoped for such success, but now, seeing the confusion into which the column had been thrown, they came dashing in, yelling

their shrill war-cry and firing furiously "into the brown"—with hardly a shot fired in reply.

McNiel, well to the rear, kept his head when most of the others seemed to have lost theirs. He caught the arm of the young sub-lieutenant in charge of his platoon, and shouted in his ear:

"Get the men dismounted, and up that bank on foot—it's the only chance to save a massacre!"

He remembered, too, an opening a little further back where horsemen could easily reach the upper level at the side of the road, though he guessed the going would be hard.

Having given his advice to the young officer, he turned his horse and galloped back to the rear. Reaching the last ten ranks, he ordered the men to wheel about, and then led them, at a mad gallop, back down the road. The other sub-lieutenant, in the rear, yelled:

"*Mon Dieu!* The cowards are deserting us!"

Then he drew his revolver and fired at McNiel, but, luckily, missed him. The Riffs were of the same opinion, and yelled their triumph as they saw, apparently, a large number of their enemies in full flight!

But they were soon to discover their mistake!

Just round a bend in the road McNiel found where rain had caused, at some time or other, a small landslide, leaving a gentle slope cut into the elsewhere steep bank.

McNiel wheeled his thirty men here, and rode them up the slope, then back along the upper level to where the sounds of combat still filled the air. The ground was stony and treacherous, and the trees dotted everywhere, so that the men had to

spread considerably—but this made the execution they inflicted, when they finally swooped down on the Riff, all the more severe.

The tribesmen were shooting triumphantly down at the men below them, taking advantage of the confusion which still existed when McNiel and his stalwarts, shouting and cheering like maniacs, thundered down upon them, slashing to right and left like fiends with their heavy sabres.

McNiel rode one man down, as he was crouching to shoot, and, with a single backhanded cut severed the head of another completely from his body! Then two attacked him simultaneously, one striking at him from the ground with his clubbed rifle, the other leaping onto his horse, clinging to his legs with his own and one hand, while he strove to use his knife with the other.

It was an occasion calling for lightning action, and McNiel achieved it. He flung himself forward in the saddle, thus eluding the murderous rifle-butt, and at the same moment gave the fellow the point—then, withdrawing his blade like a flash, he brought the heavy hilt down on the other Riff's head with terrific force. He felt the skull crack and cave in beneath the force of the blow as the fellow dropped off like a dead fly.

By this time it was all over! The Riff is never too fond of cold steel, and they were by no means sure of the number of their adversaries. So they turned and ran for it, scattering to left and right as they rushed through the trees.

McNiel's men were for chasing them, but, roaring like the bull of Bashan, McNiel brought them back. He then dismounted them, and got every man

standing beside his horse as cover, and firing either over their backs or under their bellies at the Riffs on the further side of the road.

Not too soon did he put this manœuvre into practice, either!

The young lieutenant had taken advantage of his advice, and having dismounted as many of his men as possible, had set some of them to scale the right-hand bank, while others fired over their heads to help them. But the Riffs were there in numbers, and had tremendous advantage in their position, so that things were not going too well for the attackers when Mc Niel and his men opened fire and, in a very short time, had the Riffs on that side also retreating, albeit somewhat sullenly.

With the cessation of the fire that had been pouring into them, the confusion on the road below got straightened out, and in a few minutes the sound men had been divided into two parties, dismounted, and had climbed the bank on either side.

The fight was over!

But, brief though it had been, it had been a very sanguinary one! The French had nearly thirty men killed, a dozen badly wounded, and four times as many suffering from minor wounds. They had also lost eight horses, and three so badly wounded they had to be destroyed.

Actually, it had been Mc Niel who had saved the day. Without any thought of giving himself airs, he was fully aware of this fact—and so was everybody else in the squadron.

Imagine his surprise, then, when instead of getting a pat on the back, he saw the lieutenant

—now commanding—stride up to him with a face like a thundercloud.

"Did I see you, and some thirty men, running away in the face of the enemy, Brigadier?" the lieutenant asked, grimly.

McNiell stared. He was so completely nonplussed that he could only just manage to stammer an explanation of what he actually had done. The lieutenant continued to frown:

"You were acting without orders, at the best, Brigadier!" he said, coldly. "And you are liable to punishment for so doing!"

It was on the tip of McNiel's tongue to point out that if he had not done what he did, the whole squadron had stood a mighty fine chance of being wiped out! But he restrained himself in time. Then somebody in the ranks shouted:

"He was only doing what you ought to have done, you nincompoop!"

The officer swung furiously round on the men, his revolver in his hand:

"Who said that?" he bellowed. "Stand out, the man who made that remark!"

There was no response, only a low, muttering growl of anger and contempt from the men—and the officer, seeing how ugly they looked, decided that the subject had better be dropped! So he proceeded to issue orders for the burial of the dead, and a general clearing up of the mess.

This was done methodically enough, but it gave McNiel a taste of Legion methods which made him feel rather sick.

The majority of the men, carbines at the ready, took their positions on top of the banks on either

side of the road in case the enemy should return, while the working parties got busy. Arms, equipment, and outer clothes were taken off the dead men, and they were buried collectively in a shallow, hastily-dug trench.

Before this was filled in the officer went around and examined the wounded men. Four of these were too badly hurt to sit a horse, even with assistance, and these, to McNiel's horror, the officer calmly pistolled. They were then treated in the same way as the rest of the dead men!

The wounded horses were also shot, and all the harness having been removed, the carcasses were dragged to the sides of the road and left there. The slightly wounded men had their wounds roughly bandaged, and then the remains of the column mounted their horses once more, and moved forward.

A *Maréchal des Logis*, a German named Gelder, who had some sort of regard for McNiel, approached him as they moved off:

"That Lieutenant Chermanay," he said, in a low voice. "You will have to look out for him! You have stolen his thunder—saved the day when he had already lost it! He will not forgive that—and you had better watch out!"

"Thanks for the tip!" McNiel laughed. "But I'm not very scared of him! The fellow's just a weakling!"

The other shrugged:

"Sometimes these weaklings are more dangerous than strong men! For one thing, they are less scrupulous! I advise you to be careful, *mon ami!*"

But McNiel only laughed, not realizing that this man was to prove a very dangerous thorn in his side before long!

On top of this there followed a period when McNiel realized to the full the poppycock that was talked about the "colour, romance and adventure" of life in the Foreign Legion. As the novelty of the whole thing wore off, so the sheer monotony of it all crept in. Week in and week out, month after month on end, it was a continual round of the same thing. Marching and counter-marching—moving from one place to another—sometimes being aroused from sleep in the middle of the night to boot, saddle and away—without any apparent reason! Days of blazing heat in the desert, or of riding over rocky country, where the ground was hot enough to cook on—short rations, hardship, and brutality on all sides. Constantly at the mercy of enemy snipers—seldom if ever coming to grips with them—and never anything decisive done! At the end of his first twelve months of service in the Legion he could look back on an entirely futile year!

In every town or post he stayed at McNiel sought news or rumour of Royston—but he never got so much as a clue. Once, in Fez, he did hear some rumours of a white man who was fighting on the side of Krim—a man, it was said, who led a wild band of devil-may-care warriors, and who carried as his standard a red banner with the words, in Arabic, upon it: "*Allah Cries for Blood!*" But nothing definite was to be discovered about this man, and no one had ever seen him and come back to tell the tale, so that any description of his personal

characteristics was lacking. On the whole McNiel was inclined to regard it, with so many other strange legends, as just a fairy-tale.

And then, at last, he did get something definite.

Volunteers were called for to garrison a small fort built by the Penal Battalion about 150 kilometres from Taza, and which would then be the most extended and farthest outpost of the Legion. McNiel and Nippo, sick of the monotony, promptly volunteered. By that time McNiel was a *Maréchal des Logis*, and Nippo a Brigadier. Both had earned reputations as good soldiers, sound disciplinarians, and hearty fighters, and their services were at once accepted. Before they started off for the post, both got a further step—McNiel to Adjutant, and Nippo to *Maréchal des Logis*.

The garrison, when it had been mobilized, and finally set out from Fez to march to the new fort, via Taza, consisted of one platoon of cavalry, and two companies of infantry. Usually a sub-lieutenant was in command of a platoon, but in this instance it was commanded by a full lieutenant, having under him as sub-lieutenant, an adjutant and a *maréchal des logis* (McNiel and Nippo respectively), two brigadiers, and three premier-class soldiers, with eighty men to make up the platoon. The Commandant was a Major—a decent fellow named Dostikoff, a Russian.

They marched to the fort without incident, other than the usual occasional outburst of sniping, and the relieved garrison set off back to Fez.

Then the new garrison settled down, and life became more deadly monotonous than ever—until, one night, they were aroused from slumber by the

crack of the sentries' rifles, followed almost immediately by the blare of bugles, and wild cries of: "*Aux armes! Aux armes!*"

McNiel leapt from his narrow pallet of straw in a state of the greatest excitement. The fort was being attacked, and the moment had arrived when he might have an opportunity of putting into practice a daring and ingenious scheme he had worked out to get reliable information about the whereabouts of Carol.

The garrison of the fort turned out smartly enough. They were all picked men—experienced campaigners and good soldiers, and always half the garrison slept "all standing"—i.e. fully clothed and booted, with their arms and equipment beside them.

It was as well this was so, for they only managed to man the wooden platforms which ran around the walls, within four feet of the top, just in time.

In the cover of darkness, the Riffs had crept up, silent as the death they were bringing, arriving one at a time and noiselessly assembling, right at the foot of the walls. With them they brought a number of roughly constructed scaling-ladders, made of poles, with cross-pieces of stout wood fastened at two foot intervals right along their length.

A small thing will change the destinies of a great battle, as history shows a hundred times over. In this case the garrison were undoubtedly saved by an insect which found its way into the nostrils of a Riff, crouching under the walls of the Fort, and caused him to sneeze, thereby giving the alarm about ten minutes before the attackers were actually

ready to make their rush. But for this it would have gone very badly indeed with the defenders!

As it was, once the fact of their presence was revealed, the Riffs lost no time in attacking. Those who were beneath the walls reared their scaling-poles, and came swarming up them like a horde of fighting-ants. Those who were still making their way towards the Fort immediately threw all thoughts of secrecy and caution to the winds, and, springing to their feet made a rush for the walls, to join their comrades.

The night air was made hideous by the shrill, shrieking battle cry of the oncoming horde, firing as they came, so that the blackness of the night was stabbed by the flashes of their rifles, and bullets hummed angrily overhead. To this din was added the bellowing of orders from within the Fort, and the shouting of the defenders. The men who reached the defensive platforms first had a warm time! The attackers were swarming up at a dozen different points, and already a number of them were actually inside the Fort. They did not live long, these! Bayoneted, or shot at close-quarters, their bodies were kicked off the platforms to give room for the defenders, shooting and stabbing like madmen at the dark bodies of their foemen, to work more freely.

And so the first part of the elaborate scheme which McNeil had devised in the long, idle hours which had made life in the Fort so monotonous, was made possible!

Below the platforms inside the Fort there was, of course, considerable confusion. Infantrymen, hastily fastening the last buckles of their equipment

as they ran, were dashing in all directions to take their appointed positions on the platforms above. Cavalrymen, in accordance with the often rehearsed drill in case of attack, were falling in on the centre of the courtyard. Everywhere men were rushing about, giving or taking orders, while the din of shooting and shouting was appalling!

McNiel took a quick look round. Such light as there was was supplied by lanterns—dim, flickering and uncertain. But by it McNiel was able to see the dark bodies of the Riffs who fell or were thrown into the courtyard, where those who were still alive were despatched by someone or other the moment they showed any signs of moving.

The floor of the courtyard, be it noted, was not paved. In the centre the sand had been stamped to the hardness almost of brick—but at the sides, beneath the shadow of the walls, it was as loose and soft as it was outside.

McNiel saw a dark body falling, and knew by the way it fell that the Riff was either dead or unconscious. Nevertheless, he made a rush at it, and, apparently engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle, disappeared into the darkness created by an angle of the wall. After a few minutes he emerged, panting and covered in sand, dusting his hands as he came.

It all looked natural enough, but had anyone had either the time or the inclination to investigate further, they would have been surprised to find that the body of McNiel's late "antagonist" *had entirely disappeared!*

McNiel joined the cavalrymen, who were falling in in the centre of the courtyard. The officer came

up, and, under his orders the majority of the men were formed into a hollow square right round the central building, and facing the walls. They had their carbines, and it was their duty to despatch any of the enemy who managed to break through the cordon above, and got clear of the platforms alive. As a matter of fact quite a number succeeded in doing this, but their success did not take them further than the ground, where they were instantly shot by the cavalrymen.

Meanwhile a small party, under Nippo, were sent to the stables to saddle the horses and have them ready in case of emergencies.

The fight raged on. The defenders were badly handicapped because the enemy, having got right up beneath the walls, were practically immune from any sort of attack except as and when they swarmed up their poles. For they were so close under the walls that the machine-guns could not be depressed sufficiently to get a line on them; nor could bombs or hand-grenades be used for fear of damaging the walls. Except at the gates the walls were not pierced for firing at the ground level, for the Fort stood in such clear ground that it had never been anticipated that an enemy would ever be able to get that close. A mistake, as this event showed!

McNiell followed the progress of the fight with close attention, and considerable anxiety. The success of the rest of his carefully planned scheme depended upon the attack continuing until day-break. The Riff, in making his attacks upon fortified places, almost invariably started operations during the denser darkness which precedes the dawn, and

it was on this assumption that McNiel had based his scheme.

He kept continually glancing at his wrist-watch, and presently it became evident that dawn would find the combat still in progress. It would have been wiser for the Riff leader to have withdrawn his men while the darkness still afforded some cover, but it seemed that either he was confident of ultimate success, or too frenzied with blood-lust to have any caution left!

When his watch told him that dawn was almost upon them, McNiel approached the Lieutenant in command:

"Pardon, *mon Lieutenant*, but may I make a suggestion?"

"Certainly!" answered the Lieutenant, with whom McNiel was a favourite. "What is it?"

"The dawn is approaching," McNiel answered. "In ten minutes or so it will be light enough to see by. If we—the cavalry—were to make a sortie, we could clear these rats from the base of the walls!"

"H'm!" said the officer, thoughtfully. "That's an idea! But eighty men—is that enough?"

"I should say so, *mon Lieutenant*! It could be a quick sortie—a gallop round the walls and back again! They hate cold steel, do the Riffs—and besides, they don't know how many we are! Also, if we divided outside the gate, and charged both ways at once, that would increase the confusion!"

"It is certainly an idea!" agreed the Lieutenant. "I'll go and have a word with the Commandant!"

And off he went, leaving McNiel triumphant so

far, and hoping for the best. For on that sortie hung the second part of his scheme!

The Lieutenant returned, hastily.

"The Commandant approves, McNiel!" he said. "So we'd better get busy!"

A handful of men were sent down from the platforms to do the work hitherto assigned to the cavalry, and the latter quietly got their horses, mounted, and formed up against the gates.

These, being well loopholed, and equipped with a couple of machine-guns, had easily been kept clear of the enemy throughout the attack.

The gates were just wide enough to allow the passage of three horsemen riding abreast. The men were formed into the usual three-formation, therefore, and were carefully instructed that alternate ranks were to turn in opposite directions—thus, the first rank was to turn *right*, the second rank *left*, the third rank *right*, and so on. The officers would, of course, lead the way. So the first rank was actually composed of the Lieutenant and McNiel; the sub-lieutenant and Nippo forming the second, with the two Brigadiers and the three P.C.S.'s in the rear.

The first streak of dawn shot across the sky, and, in response to a low order the men drew their sabres. The officer raised his hand, and men stood by the gates, ready to withdraw the great bars and swing them open.

A little more light—enough to see by, now!

The Lieutenant's hand dropped. With lightning celerity the bars were withdrawn, and the stout gates swung back. Then the Lieutenant waved his hand with a forward motion, the men struck

spurs into their horses and next moment, yelling like demons—or like the Riffs themselves—the two lines of cavalry were galloping round the walls of the Fort, carrying death and decimation in the whirl of their sabres.

Very much like a circus performance it was—only rather grimmer! By prearrangement, when the two parties of riders met, half-way round the walls, the left contingent took the outside, and the right kept their inside station. Thus they made a second circuit. McNiel fought like a tiger, slashing and lopping at heads, arms, or whatever was nearest his thirsty blade—but all the time he was as cool as a cucumber, and waiting his chance!

The Riffs were taken badly by surprise. This was a manœuvre they had certainly not counted upon! It flung them into complete confusion! They went down like slaughtered cattle before those deadly sabres, and the heaps of bleeding, dismembered corpses piled horribly around the walls. Their scaling-poles were flung down, and the men who had been climbing them ruthlessly trampled under foot or sabred as they lay.

Before the second circle was completed panic got them, and they were in full flight—with most of the cavalry in hot pursuit. Nippo led the pursuers, yelling like a madman, and slashing to left and right at the fugitives. But the bugles, sounding the “recall,” stopped the pursuit, and brought the men galloping back, so that the deadly machine-guns could get to work!

McNiel had his own business to attend to as soon as the enemy broke, and attended to it with great promptitude. He picked on a tall, lusty young

Riff, and made for him. The fellow saw him coming, and immediately stopped in his flight and turned to face his pursuer. He clubbed his rifle and whirled it above his head, but McNiel, avoiding the terrific blow he aimed with it, struck him heavily across the wrist with the flat of his sabre, a cleverly timed blow that caused the young man to drop his rifle. But as McNiel came at him again, he drew his knife, and made a spring right at horse and rider. Which was exactly what McNiel wanted! With one hand he gripped the knife-arm at the wrist, and with the other brought the hilt of his sabre heavily down on the dark head. The fellow grunted and went limp, and McNiel dragged him across his saddle-bow.

Then the recall sounded.

The men were galloping back, and, a moment later, the machine-guns on the walls started to sputter. McNiel paused to take a look round, and then saw that Nippo had had his horse shot under him as he was returning. Now he was lying behind its carcass, taking what cover he could, but in more danger from the machine-gun bullets of his friends than the rifle bullets of his enemies! There were a number of Riffs lying scattered about him, more or less wounded. One of these fired at him, and, from the start he gave, McNiel knew he had been hit. Two other wounded Riffs were crawling towards him laboriously, their knives gripped in their teeth, and murder in their eyes!

McNiel gave a loud shout of encouragement. Then he drew his revolver, and coolly picked the wounded Riffs off, one at a time. Lastly he thrust his revolver

back into its holster, put his horse to a gallop, and dashed to the rescue.

Despite the hail of machine-gun bullets, some of the Riffs, seeing this single *Légionnaire* dashing in their direction, paused in their flight to turn their rifles upon him. Bullets sang nastily about his ears, and one clipped the metal numeral on his shoulder with a jar that shook him in his saddle.

He dashed obliquely at Nippo, and, as he reached him, did the old cowboy trick of bending low in his saddle and, getting a grip on the prone man's belt, swung him also up before him. It was well that Nippo was a lightweight, and also that McNiel's horse was a big and powerful one! As it was it stood up to the strain wonderfully, and McNiel, with the bullets still singing about his ears, rode triumphantly through the gates—the last man to get back.

Nippo grinned as McNiel lowered him from the saddle, and whispered:

"Wot, again . . . ? Don't you make a 'abit of this, ole pal—they'll get you sooner or later if you do!"

The Lieutenant nodded to McNiel:

"You are a brave man, *mon ami!*" he commented, approvingly. Then, as he caught sight of the unconscious Riff: "But what, in the name of ten thousand devils, have you got there?"

"A prisoner, *mon Lieutenant!*"

"A *prisoner* . . . ! But, *mon Dieu*, what do we want with *prisoners*? We haven't food enough for ourselves . . . !"

McNiel had let the unconscious form of his captive

fall to the ground, and now the officer commenced to lug out his revolver with obvious intentions! McNiel's heart went into his boots! After all the trouble, not to mention the risk, he had taken . . . !

"Pardon, *mon Lieutenant*—one moment! We may be able to get some valuable information out of this fellow—he seems to be a chief, of sorts!"

"Information . . . ?" stormed the Lieutenant. "How can we get information from him? Who is there here who knows his accursed language?"

"I do, *mon Lieutenant*!"

"You do?"

"Yes. I—I am interested in such matters . . . !" (Quite true—he had managed to learn something of the language against the day when he should go into the Riff country to find Carol! But he did not explain that latter fact!) "Let me see what I can get out of him, *mon Lieutenant*, I beg you. Afterwards we can kill him . . . !"

The officer shrugged:

"Well, we'll see what the Commandant has to say about it! Shut him up somewhere, meanwhile!"

Against one corner of the walls there was a little, lean-to shed, built of heavy wood, and with a strong door. McNiel slung his prisoner into that, bolted the door, and set a guard over it. Then he went about his duties.

The attack was finally over. The defeat of the attackers had been a signal one: their losses little short of appalling. From the bodies left on the spot it was estimated that they had lost nearly a hundred men—two thirds of their entire numbers, so far as could be estimated. Fully a third of these

had been slaughtered by machine-gun fire during the retreat!

After a busy day helping to superintend the burial of the dead—which included twenty *légionnaires*—McNiel returned to the Fort to find himself summoned before the Commandant.

CHAPTER XI

"I SENT A MESSAGE TO MY LOVE . . . !"

"WHAT is this I hear about a prisoner?" the Commandant demanded.

McNiel explained—as he had explained to the Lieutenant. "And do you really think you can get anything out of the fellow?"

"I think it likely, *mon Commandant*!"

"Humph!" grunted the Commandant, and then added, grimly: "Do you know anything about extracting information from—er—reluctant, or recalcitrant, prisoners?"

McNiel, feeling a trifle sick, tried to imitate his superior's sinister smile:

"I think I could manage, *mon Commandant*! A lighted match between the fingers, or a thin cord round the head, twisted with the barrel of a revolver, for instance?"

"Just so," said the Commandant, pleasantly. "Well, see what you can do—we can always shoot the fellow afterwards!"

McNiel took a lantern—for it was pitch dark in the hut—and went in to the prisoner. In the meanwhile the man had been handcuffed, and to the handcuffs a chain had been fastened, and padlocked to a staple in the wall. He had been given some water, but no food.

He glared sullenly at McNiel as the latter entered the hut, carefully closing the door behind him,

Then he set the lantern on the floor, so that both their faces were illuminated, and faced the scowling prisoner:

"I am your friend!" he said, slowly, in the Riff tongue—which is almost the same as the language spoken by the Berbers.

The prisoner, by way of reply, spat at him:

"Be not foolish!" McNiel adjured him. "I tell thee that I am thy friend! Furthermore, if thou doest what I ask of thee—which is not much—thou shalt have not only thy life, but thy liberty—and that this very night! This I swear, both in the name of Allah, who is thy god, and in the name of Jehovah, who is mine!"

The prisoner seemed impressed by this, and McNiel went on:

"Here they think I captured thee that I might get information out of thee for them, either by torture or by persuasion. If I should succeed in getting this information, then they will shoot thee! If, on the other hand, I fail to get it, they will still shoot thee! But, between ourselves, I do not intend to try to get it. I want some information for myself—and if thou canst supply it, then thou goest free!"

He paused. The prisoner was looking at him in more friendly fashion.

"What wouldst thou know?" he asked, at last.

"This. Is there, in the service of your Chief, Krim, a white man?"

The native, plainly a young man of considerable intelligence, eyed him closely. The result of the scrutiny seemed to be favourable, for he replied to the question with another:

"Why dost thou want to know?"

"I will tell thee—why not? I knew this man in a distant land, far across the seas. I have a reason to wish to see him again, and if I can find out his whereabouts, I shall desert from the French, and come to your land to find him, and speak with him!"

The young man considered this reply, and at last answered:

"There is such a man—but whether he is the one you want or not, who can say?"

McNiel's heart leapt. Could it be that he was to get something definite at last?

"What sort of man is he—tell me?" he asked, eagerly.

The young man considered:

"He is of middle-height, with a beard, so"—he moved his manacled hands, descriptive of the pointed beard worn by Royston. "His nose is big, and his eyes are fierce. His voice is like that of a bull, or of a lion roaring in the desert. He is a fierce fighter, and a good, though severe, commander. He fears nothing!"

"By God!" cried McNiel, in English. "But that sounds like him!"

His hands were trembling, and his eyes shining with unwonted excitement, as he leaned forward and asked his next question.

"But his name? Has he no name amongst your people?"

"Yes. He is known as Roy-es-stone!"

McNiel's excitement increased. There could be no doubt now as to the identity of this man. It must be Royston, right enough. His excitement

was intense—and then, like a cold *douche* of water, came the realization that this fellow had not mentioned Carol! A daughter, so beautiful as she was, could hardly be ignored in so graphic a description! A terrible fear came to him that something had happened to his beloved—as it well might, in that country where anything might happen!

He had to force himself to ask the next question calmly, but managed to do so:

"That sounds like the man! But tell me, has he not got a maiden with him—a maiden of great beauty and charm?"

The prisoner stared for a moment, and then, to Mc Niel's inexpressable dismay, he shook his head:

"No!" he said. "There is no maiden! And this man, Roy-es-stone, is not the kind of man who cares for women! War, and slaying the accursed French, is all that he cares for! I do not think I have ever seen him look twice at even the most beauteous maiden . . . !"

The floor of the hut seemed to rock beneath the feet of Mc Niel, and, for a moment, everything went dark in front of his eyes. There was a singing in his ears, and the blackest and deadliest despair seemed to clutch, with icy fingers, at his heart. If Carol were not with Royston, then she must be dead . . . !

Then, dimly, he became aware that the prisoner was still speaking, and slowly the meaning of his words drifted through the fog that was clogging his brain:

" . . . Yet it would seem that he must once have loved, for his son is the apple of his eye. One does

not love a son as Roy-es-stone loves this son of his if he has been born by an unloved wife . . . !"

McNiel came back to earth again and stared at his informant in amazement:

"His son, sayest thou? He has a son?"

"Verily! A comely youth, too. Something of a weakling, maybe, though he rides and shoots well. But he does not fight—instead he devotes himself to tending the wounded and the sick, which is really a woman's work . . . !"

The despair fell away from McNiel's heart, and he almost shouted in his excitement, for a new idea had come to him. But, forcing himself to be calm, he asked:

"And this son, what is his name?"

"A strange one. His father calls him Kar-olle!"

McNiel had to hold himself in to prevent himself from dancing about the hut in his delight and intense relief! In a flash he saw the whole thing—realized that Royston had disguised Carol as a boy, fearing that her dark beauty would appeal to the wild Riffs, and cause trouble of the worst sort! So that Carol was alive, comparatively safe, and—wonder of wonders—actually within a few hundred *kilometres* of that very spot . . . !

He realized that the prisoner was watching him, both curiously and intelligently, and he hastily pulled himself together:

"It is well! This Roy-es-stone of thine is undoubtedly the man I seek, and soon I shall be coming to him. Tell me, how shall I find him?"

"There is but one way. This Roy-es-stone is a great friend of Ab-del-Krim, whom Allah defend, and he is as a great chief amongst us. He has

built for himself a secret city, in the heart of the mountains, and it is said that not even the largest army could ever force a way into it. Make thy way to the town of Bab Khemis, and there ask for one Sidi-Ben-Kharmet. Tell him thy tale, and if he believe thee, he will take or send thee to Roy-es-stone. Or if, as is likely, thou art taken by some of our bands, then hasten to tell them that thou art on thy way to Roy-es-stone, and that he expects thee, and will work evil upon any who molest thee. By that means thou mayst escape death!"

McNiel absorbed this not entirely reassuring information, and thanked the prisoner.

"Presently," he said, "when all is quiet, I will return, and will see to it that thou goest free, as I have promised. But this must be done secretly, so be cautious. Now, I am supposed to be torturing thee—so scream and wail as though thou wert being hurt!"

The prisoner grinned understandingly, and, next moment, made McNiel jump by letting out an ear-piercing scream. McNiel immediately started shouting abuse in Arabic, and the wails and yells that came from the prisoner must have sounded as though he were undergoing the direst tortures. Finally McNiel signalled him to be quiet, and the dreadful cries died away into a characteristic and convincing series of moans and wails.

McNiel opened the door, and, standing in the doorway with his lantern, shouted at the prisoner within, in Arabic:

"Thou son of a stinking dog! I will make thee speak yet—or I will flay thee alive!" Then he slammed the door and shot home the bolts.

To the guard outside he said:

"The man is as obstinate as a pig! I'll come back later, and I'll make him speak then—or . . .!"

And he turned and walked away.

McNiel avoided, for the time being, the company of his comrades. He wanted to be alone, and to think. If he could! For within him his heart seemed to be singing a wild song—the refrain of which was: "Carol! At last—at last!"

He climbed up to the defence-platform, deserted now except for the sentries, and stood by an angle of the walls, looking out over the desert in the direction where he estimated his loved one would be, and thinking how he could get to her.

Within a few days he would make his getaway, somehow! A simple plan came to him. Somehow he and Nippo must contrive to go out alone into the desert. Perhaps they would have to take a patrol with them, but they could lose them, temporarily. Then Nippo could come back, and report that he, McNiel, had been hit and killed by a sniper! He had buried him in the desert, and come back to report! He could bring back his weapons and equipment—and then, at the worst, McNiel would be miles and miles away before they suspected the truth. With luck, they never would! In the meantime he would send Carol a letter by this fellow . . . no, a letter might be dangerous, if the man were recaptured. Just a message, by word of mouth. Something she would understand . . .!"

It was long after dark, and all was quiet, when McNiel revisited the hut where the prisoner lay. He carried in his hand a huge bull-whip.

Thereafter there came from the hut the sound of blows, mingled with shrieks and lamentations of pain. After that there was silence for a little while.

Then McNiel emerged from the hut.

"Hey, you!" he growled, to the guard. "Go to the quartermaster's stores and get a brazier, and some sort of an iron—also some fuel! I'll make this dog talk yet!"

The guard went off, and, the moment he was out of sight, McNiel got busy. First he ran to the corner of the wall, and, after scrabbling in the sand for a few moments, unearthed the Riff body he had buried there at the commencement of the attack. Hastily he carried this back to the hut, where he unlocked the handcuffs from the prisoner's wrists, and fastened them to the stiff ones of the dead man.

He had calculated to a nicety the time it would take the guard to find the brazier, fuel, etc., for he had just completed this task when there came a knock on the door. McNiel grabbed the Riff, and pushed him into a position so that the door would open back on him. Then he opened it.

"No good now!" he said to the guard. "I lost my temper and did for the swine!"

And he held the lantern aloft so that its flickering rays fell on the prone body of the long-dead Riff in the corner!

"You can return the brazier to store, and then turn in if you want to!" he said to the guard. "Your duty's finished for to-night, anyway!"

"*Le bon Dieu* be thanked!" said the soldier, piously as he went off again with the brazier.

McNiel extinguished his lantern, and, as soon

as he was sure the guard was well away, he went back into the hut, unwinding a long, thin, strong cord from around his waist and beneath his tunic as he did so.

To the prisoner he said:

"You see, I am keeping my word! In a few minutes you will be free. I do not make it a condition, but will you do me a service?"

"Since thou keepst thy word, I will do anything that is in my power for thee!" answered the Riff, with feeling.

"Good! As soon as you can, then, will you go to this youth Kar-olle, son of Roy-es-stone, and give him a message from me?"

"Surely! As soon as I get back to my people I will see to it! What is the message?"

"Just this. Tell her—I mean tell *him*—that *thou hast seen Jimmy, and that he is coming as soon as may be!* Can you remember that?"

"Surely! I have seen Jim-mee, and he is coming as soon as may be!"

"Good! And now, what is thy name? It may be we shall meet again."

"I pray that we shall! My name is Ahmedo Heriro—and I am well known amongst my own people!"

"Good again! And now, listen . . .!" And McNiel gave him careful instructions as to the exact plan of escape.

A few moments later the two left the hut, and crossed quietly to one of the ladders leading up to the defence-platform.

McNiel mounted, and, as he reached the top, he fastened the steel hook at the end of his long

cord to the top rung of the ladder. Then he walked a little way along the platform, and called in a low voice to the sentry.

The man approached, and McNiel spoke to him, planting himself in such a position that he screened the top of the ladder.

Heriro could see their forms silhouetted against the sky, and when he judged the moment to be right, he slipped up the ladder like a shadow, found the rope, and, in a split-second, had slipped over the outer edge of the wall and was lowering himself by means of the cord.

After a few moments McNiel finished his conversation with the sentry! Then he lit a cigarette, and stood staring out over the desert waste. Presently, from the distance, there came the faintest flash of light, and McNiel heaved a sigh of relief and contentment. It was a vesta which he had given to Heriro, to light when he was well clear, as a signal that all was well with him.

"Did you see that, *mon Adjutant*?" the sentry called to him.

"See what?"

"A little light that flashed out there in the desert!"

"I saw no light!" McNiel answered. "If not your imagination, it was a fire-fly, or something like that, I expect!"

A few moments later he went back down the ladder, dragging his cord after him. When he got below he rolled it up, and then made his way to his quarters.

At the door leading to them he found Nippo awaiting him:

"Hey!" was that worthy's greeting. "What's all this about you torturing prisoners!"

"Nonsense!" answered McNiel, in a low voice. "I've tortured no prisoners! Anyway, the prisoner's no more!"

"You mean he's dead?"

"You'll see his body, if you look in the hut!"

"What the devil *have* you been up to, anyway?" Nippo asked.

"Want to know?" McNiel grinned.

"Sure I do!"

"Well, I've been sending a message to Carol Royston!"

"You've been *what*?"

"You heard me!"

"Oh, blimey!" Nippo gasped. "The bloke's gone clean *cafard*!"

"Maybe!" answered McNiel. "Anyway, we'll have a talk in the morning, when I shall have quite a lot to say! But I'm tired now, and I'm going to bed."

Which he did—to dream the happiest dreams he had known since he joined the Legion!

CHAPTER XII

DISASTER!

McNIEL had a reputation amongst the men for being "a good fellow"—but nobody had ever regarded him as a gay one!

So that when, after the affair of the Riff prisoner, his manner became rather like that of a schoolboy on the eve of the holidays, some little astonishment was caused amongst the troops. Decidedly the Fort was not such an inspiring place as all that, they told each other, and some of them who liked him watched him with anxiety, lest he should be going *cafard*!

McNiel was, of course, blissfully unaware of this—but he would not have minded much had he known all about it! The proximity of his sweetheart; the knowledge that she was safe; the prospect of going to her soon, and the fact that, so far, all his plans had run with magical smoothness, all combined to make him the complete optimist.

And, certainly, up to now everything had gone wonderfully well! The one snag left, after the successful escape of Heriro, was the danger that the dead body in the hut might be recognized as being other than that of the late prisoner. But in the early morning McNiel selected four men who had, to the best of his knowledge, never set eyes on the prisoner, and proceeded to unchain the body in the hut, put it on a stretcher, and, covered

only by a piece of coarse sackcloth, to take it outside the walls for burial.

Even then, he had one bad moment! They were almost at the gates when they ran right into the Commandant himself, with McNiel's own officer, the Lieutenant.

"Hullo!" exclaimed the Commandant. "What is this? Someone dead?"

McNiel, his heart in his mouth, saluted:

"I am sorry, *mon Commandant!*" he apologised. "It is that accursed prisoner! You were right—I couldn't get a word out of the dog! So I killed him!"

"That's as well!" said the Commandant. "The only safe Riff is the dead one! By the way, how did you kill him?"

McNiel cursed inwardly. An awkward question, that! He dared not say he had shot the fellow, because, of course, had he done so the noise of the report would have attracted attention. Actually, this corpse had been bayoneted—he, as a cavalry man, carried no bayonet, and the nature of the wound would easily be recognizable if the Commandant chose to look at it. Nothing for it but to take a chance, though . . .!

"I stabbed him, *mon Commandant!*" he answered, with apparent promptness.

"*Bon!*" said the Commandant. "No use wasting good ammunition!"

And then he gave McNiel the prime shock of all. He took the sacking delicately between finger and thumb, and glanced at the fellow's face!

But the glance was a casual one, and one Riff looks very much like another, anyway! And so he

did not realize that the man on the stretcher was not the prisoner McNiel had brought in after the sortie!

He dropped the sacking, dusted his hands, and said:

"*Bon !* Carry on!"

As the party proceeded, McNiel wiped quite a lot of sweat from his brow, for all that it was early morning!

That evening McNiel told Nippo the whole story, and then proceeded to outline his plan for deserting. Nippo listened, but did not register any great approval of the scheme.

"It's all Sir Garnet for you, ole cock!" was his comment. "But wot price yer 'umble? I mean, I joined this ruddy Legion just 'cos you did, an' I don't see bein' left 'ere on me perishin' lonesome!"

"I see the point!" McNiel conceded. "But, after all, the important thing is that *I* should get away first. You can follow on later—at the first opportunity!"

"Oh, I see!" snorted Nippo. "But 'ow shall I know which *is* the fust opportunity? They come so thick an' fast I might not recognize it!"

"Don't fool, Nippo! You see what I mean, don't you?"

"Reckon I do! What you mean is the old Army motto: 'Bless you, Jack—I'm all right!'"

And when McNiel had left him, addressing the blazing blue of the skies, he commented:

"Blimey! An' that's wot *luv* does for a bloke! Before he met this bird, ole Mac would never 'ave thought of leaving a chum in the lurch like that!"

Nevertheless, Nippo fell in with the plan—which

was, after all, a simple one. Occasionally the cavalry went out on patrol, and when they did, they went out in force. During the next patrol-march Mc Niel's horse would bolt, and Nippo would dash after him, apparently anxious about his chum's safety. Out of sight amongst the sand-dunes, Nippo would fire his carbine twice in the air. Then, with Mc Niel's arms and equipment, he would ride sorrowfully back to report his death at the hands of a Riff sniper. It was not a brilliant plan, and would likely enough get Nippo into mild trouble—since *légionnaires* are not supposed to dash after their comrades, even if a horse does bolt! But it was the best they could think of, and would have to do.

But, as it happened, it was never put to the test!

One evening, with his face alight with excitement and pleasure, Mc Niel informed Nippo that there was to be a patrol-march the following day. His spirits soared, and he actually hummed a song as he strode across the parade-ground—much to the amazement of the men he chanced to meet.

And then, early the following morning, their relief arrived, and he was told they were to march at once, back to Fez!

It was a terrible disappointment, but Mc Niel told himself that, after all, Fez was not far off, and that there would be infinitely more, and better, opportunities for desertion there! After which piece of philosophical reasoning he felt better!

But alas, there was again no chance at Fez!

An hour after the column had ridden in, the cavalry squadron were off again—to head by forced marches for Meknes, where, it seemed, they

were urgently needed. And McNiel went with them, his high spirits gone; plunged in the deepest gloom, feeling that every step his horse took carried him further away from Carol, and the Land of his Heart's Desire! Nippo tried to comfort him, was snarled at for his pains, and retired in dudgeon.

The old round again! Forced marches, insufficient food or sleep, and a bad dose of sniping on the way! Some fifty *kilos* from Meknes Nippo took a bad wound in the shoulder from this cause. He managed to keep his saddle, however, with McNiel's aid—which was lucky for him, since the Legion, when on the march, carry no wounded. The man who cannot ride his horse, or march on his own feet, is left by the roadside to fare as best he may!

There seemed to be no urgent need for them in Meknes, after all. But this was only the normal Legion method—pushing the troops for endless miles over the desert, almost killing them by forced marches and under-feeding, and all, apparently, for no special purpose at all!

Nippo went into hospital, and McNiel, when his duty was done, wandered about the city, trying to formulate some reasonably likely method of deserting. For to make the Riff country from Fez or Taza was one thing—and to do it from Meknes quite another!

From Meknes to Fez is over 150 *kilos*, and, with a price upon his head as a deserter, and every wandering Arab roustabout his potential capturer, it was quite clear to McNiel that he would never make the first fifty of them! No, it needed a plan, and a clever plan, to make desertion possible—

and McNiel's head was as empty of ideas as a sieve might have been!

Life at Meknes did not interest him in the least, but there was one rumour that certainly did. For it was whispered in *cafés* and canteens that the astute Ab-del-Krim had started a system for helping discontented *légionnaires* to escape from the country!

Certainly there had, during the last few weeks, been an enormous increase in the number of desertions—and an almost equal *decrease* in the proportion of captures. The theory was that Krim was forming a sort of Foreign Legion of his own, to fight against the French! But it was also said that he did not insist on the men he, or his agents, helped to desert, fighting for him. Every *légionnaire* who successfully deserted was, after all, one active enemy the less for the Riff, and so he was willing just to smuggle them out of the country and so get rid of them!

Naturally enough, McNiel was keenly interested in these rumours, and tried hard, if unobtrusively, to verify some of them. But without success, until, one day, a strange thing happened.

McNiel had just come out of a *café* in the town, and was preparing to walk back to barracks, when a soft, gentle voice sounded at his elbow:

"Pardon, Excellency, but art not thou the *Adjutant* Mac-Niel?"

McNiel swung round, to find himself face to face with an elderly Arab, whose features were so wrapped in his *burnouse* that he could not distinguish them very well.

"My name is McNiel—what of it?" he asked, sharply.

"Nothing that is not to thy advantage, brother! But it is well not to attract attention to ourselves!" The Arab took a swift glance round, and then went on, in a lower voice: "Hast any desire to leave the Legion?"

"Why—yes!" McNiel was a little taken aback, and uncertain how to answer. "I—I have thought of it!" he added.

"Good!" said the Arab. "Then, if at any time thou art thinking of deserting, come to the dance-hall of the Seven Hearts, in the Street of the Onion-Sellers, any evening!"

And then, before McNiel could answer him, the Arab had disappeared as though wafted away by magic!

Thinking over this strange interview on his way back to barracks, McNiel's excitement suddenly commenced to rise—for he realized that there was, after all, something in these rumours about Krim and desertion, and, no doubt, the old Arab was one of his agents!

The following evening, as soon as he was free, McNiel made his way to the dance-hall. He paid his five sous to enter, as did the other visitors, and went in. The place was just the ordinary sort of low dive. The dances given by naked Arab women were of the usual type, and there was no sign of the old Arab. McNiel commenced to feel annoyed. He had been hoaxed, he decided!

Then, just as he turned to leave, one of the girls touched him on the arm. He would have shaken her off with a rough word, but she addressed him

in fairly good English, and her words arrested his attention immediately:

"Is it that my Lord wishes to continue a conversation begun last night in the streets?" she asked him.

McNiell signified that nothing would please him better.

"Then follow me—as though we were going out together in the ordinary way!" said the girl. "Caution is necessary!"

She led him, laughing, chatting, and "making eyes" at him as she did so, through the heavy-curtained doorway which was used by the girls of the place and their "clients." Then, more swiftly, through a long, low corridor, with curtained recesses on either side, from which came faint but unmistakable sounds. Finally to a door, guarded by a huge negro, who, at a sign from the girl, unlocked it and allowed them to enter.

Inside was a sort of ante-room, with another door at the further end. The girl tapped on this, opened it, and said:

"The Englishman to see you, Father!"

"Bid him enter!" said a voice from within, and, a moment later, McNiell was facing the old Arab once more.

"So you have made up your mind?" said the Arab, quietly. "You do wish to desert?"

McNiell nodded.

"That is good! Now, if you are aided in this, are you prepared to fight for the Chief Ab-del-Krim, against the accursed French who have treated you so badly?"

McNiell hesitated.

"As a matter of fact they have not treated me so badly!" he said, at last. "And, having eaten their salt, and drawn their pay, I do not know that I feel justified in fighting against them!"

"That is honourable of you—but a pity!" said the Arab, drily. "However, it need not affect matters greatly. If we get you out of the country, you will not come back—that is certain!"

"Quite!" agreed McNiel, and then added, eagerly: "But I do not want to get out of the country altogether! I want to go into the country of the Riff!"

The Arab looked startled at this, and demanded to know why.

"There is one fighting for Krim whom I wish to see—a coutryman of mine, one Roy-es-stone!" McNiel explained.

"Ah!" said the Arab. "I have heard of him!" He thought for a moment, and then added: "Very well, it is a bargain. You give me your word you will never fight for the French again, and I will see to it that you are safely taken into the Atlas!"

McNiel's spirits went up with a bound:

"Decidedly, you have my word!" he said, gravely.

"That is good! Are you ready to start now—at once!"

McNiel was about to agree with the utmost delight, when he suddenly thought of Nippo, lying helpless in hospital. He could not leave his chum without a word, or without making any arrangements for Nippo to join him later. A sudden idea came to him:

"There is a friend of mine—he is sick now, wounded in hospital. Would it be possible for him to join me, with your aid, later on?"

"Assuredly!" replied the Arab. "You may tell him where to come—but be cautious!"

"Of course I will!" McNiel agreed.

"Then you will not start now?" the Arab asked him.

"I must see my friend first. What about to-morrow?"

"To-morrow is never so good as to-day!" the Arab smiled. "But to-morrow must do! Come here at the same hour, and the same girl will speak to you!"

McNiel went back to barracks with his heart dancing, and his feet treading on air! After all, that march to Meknes had been a blessing in disguise, he told himself! He would see Nippo in hospital, on the excuse of regimental business, the following morning, and in the evening he would be on his way to Carol!

Almost too good to be true! thought McNiel—and he was nearer being right about that than he knew!

For, to start with, the following morning another bitter disappointment awaited him. Within half-an-hour of *reveille* he was marching once more, with his squadron, for an unknown destination! And if anything could have made this more bitter than it was, it would have been the fact that the Squadron Commander was none other than Cher-manay, the Lieutenant who had been in command during that attack on the road, now promoted to Captain!

While on the march he learned the object of this expedition, and was a little startled to find out that it was in connection with this very organized series of desertions that had been the basis of so many rumours—rumours which he now knew to be true!

Recently a number of deserters had been traced to an Arab village, about 75 *kilos* from Meknes. The evidence that they had been there at all was not really conclusive, having been supplied by native spies, never entirely reliable. But the authorities were so badly concerned about the whole affair that it had been deemed good enough to send a punitive expedition to look into the matter. Charmanay's instructions were thoroughly to search the village on the off-chance of their being some deserters harboured there at the time. If he found none, then he was to use every means (which meant pillage and torture) to extract information from the chief or headman of the village. Finally, the village was to be burned to the ground—unless the required information had been obtained!

McNiell was concerned about this—more, now, than about his own affairs. For those, after all, were merely a matter of time. He could, no doubt, desert as he had planned as soon as they got back to Meknes. But this affair of the village . . . ! He felt, in a way, that he was now a beneficiary by this desertion scheme, and to take a part in the torture and murder (for he had no doubt as to what would happen, knowing the methods of the Legion in such matters) of those taking part in it would be a despicable and cowardly act on his part.

Yet—how to get hold of it? He could find no answer to that question!

After three days' march they arrived at the village in the early morning. They galloped down upon it like a whirlwind, dividing and deploying within a hundred yards of the little collection of mud-huts, so that, in a few minutes, they had it entirely surrounded.

Then the chief, and all the men-folk of the village were rounded up, at the muzzle of the carbine, like a herd of sheep, after which the business of searching began. It was not a pleasant business, either. The air was full of the cries and lamentations of hurt and frightened women, as their household goods were ruthlessly flung out of the doors, and the huts searched to the uttermost inch—floors and walls tapped for secret hiding places, and every place where even a flea could have taken refuge meticulously searched.

They found not a trace of deserters, past or present!

Then Chermanay proceeded to interrogate the chief. He was an old man, and he said he knew nothing. Nor could any effort on the part of Chermanay shake his statement. He was flogged—but not with sufficient brutality to prevent him talking later. No result! The Captain had a rope put round his neck, and actually half-hanged the old man—but still no result!

Then he picked ten of the best and smartest young men of the village, and lined them up in front of a firing party:

"Now, old dog—speak! Or I shoot your young men in front of your eyes!"

There were tears in those same eyes as the chief answered, still with perfect dignity:

"I know nothing of these matters, so how can I speak?"

Chermanay made a gesture with his hand. The rifles rattled, and the line of young men crumpled and fell, some of them dead, others writhing in agony. A sub-lieutenant finished off these latter with his revolver.

"Now, find me the ten prettiest girls!" ordered Chermanay.

He was obeyed. The girls were dragged from the shelter of their huts, their veils torn off, and the ten prettiest were presently standing in a line, with their wrists bound behind them, weeping bitterly. All save one—and she was the loveliest of them all.

This girl alone of that pathetic line stood erect, with her head well up and a proud light of defiance in her beautiful eyes.

As for the chief, he was staring at this dreadful scene like one in the grip of a terrible nightmare. His limbs trembled, though his face was expressionless as that of a graven image. But the agony in his old eyes was dreadful to look upon!

The beautiful girl saw this, and presently she called out:

"Be comforted, O my Father—I am not afraid to die!"

And Chermanay, hearing her words, glanced keenly from the girl to the old chief, and an evil light came into his eyes:

"By God!" he swore. "But, if the worst comes to the worst, I'll make the old dog speak yet!"

He gave an order, and the rifles of the firing

party rattled as they came up to the shoulder. Then he turned to the chief:

"Will you speak—or will you slay these maidens also?"

And the chief answered:

"How can I speak, since I know nothing!"

"Obstinate old ——!" snarled the Captain. He rode his horse up to the line of doomed girls, and, catching the chief's daughter roughly by the shoulder, dragged her out of it. Then he gave the order to fire—and nine young maidens went to join the young men!

Chermanay dragged the girl he had saved over to the chief:

"This is your daughter, is it not?" he demanded.

"It is!" the chief answered.

"Then, by God!" Chermanay roared—he was fast working himself up into an ungovernable passion at what he considered the chief's obstinacy—"then, by God, if you don't speak it will be the worse for her! D'you hear me, old dog? I'll make you—aye, and her—wish that she was lying where those other girls are! Now, for the last time, *will you speak?*"

The chief, his proud dignity slipping from him for an instant, looked up at the red-faced, perspiring ruffian with the expression of a tortured animal:

"How can I? I tell you, I know nothing of it! In the name of Allah, I swear it!"

"Allah be damned!" blasphemed the officer. "You know something, all right!"

While this colloquy was going on the girl was casting furtive, pathetic glances around her, as though eager for the small comfort of even one

sympathetic face. But if that was what she sought she was disappointed, for on the faces of those debased brutes there appeared almost every possible expression—except sympathy. Most of them were grinning in anticipation of what they would regard as “fun”!

But one at least of them was not grinning! McNiel, who was sitting his horse quite close to the scene, had been getting whiter and tenser as Chermanay proceeded from outrage to outrage. Now his face was like a grey mask, from which his narrowed eyes flashed, and a tiny trickle of blood ran down his chin where he had bitten into his lip. He felt physically sick, and it was as though great drums were being beaten inside his head!

Chermanay ran his eye over the ranks of his men, and presently found the face he had been looking for.

“Hey, you—Moughliff! Come here!” he ordered.

A *légionnaire* detached himself from the ranks, and came shambling towards his officer. He passed as a Russian, but, from the look of him, there was more negroid than slavonic blood in his veins. He was a huge, hairy creature, with small, pig-like eyes set far back under his heavy brows, a wide, flattened nose, and great thick, blubber-lips. His arms were over-long, his legs a trifle bandy. He was known amongst the men as “The Missing Link,” and he looked it. Furthermore he was just as bestial as he looked.

“Moughliff!” said Chermanay, as the fellow drew near, and halted, “you would know what to do with this girl if I handed her over to you, wouldn’t you?”

Moughliff stared at the soft, gleaming beauty of

the girl, and he licked his thick lips with the horrible gesture of an animal.

"Why yes, *mon Capitaine!*" he answered.

There came a low murmur from the ranks. The less brutalized of the *légionnaires* found this a bit too much for them! Chermanay took no notice of them. He was being very deliberate. Then from the crowd of Arabs, there came a wild, screaming curse, and a young man flung himself forward. A rifle cracked, and he dropped, writhing, in his tracks.

It was then that, for the second time, the girl screamed. She swayed for an instant, as though about to fall, and then, with a terrific effort, she pulled herself together.

"Now!" said Chermanay, to the chief, "will you speak? If not I will shame your daughter and yourself, in the sight of your men and of mine—aye, and in the very sight of this Allah of yours himself! I have shown you that my threats are no idle ones, and I shall carry out what I threaten! What do you say?"

The chief, beside himself with horror and fear, lost control. He flung his dignity to the winds. On his knees he begged and pleaded, weeping, for mercy for this daughter of his. . . . The apple of his eye—so young and so beautiful. . . . She, who had never harmed anyone . . . never could, so gentle was she! Let the officer do as he liked with him, or with all the rest of the villagers—but let him spare this innocent girl, and Allah would bless him forever . . . !

It was a terrible scene, this complete breakdown of the worn and tortured old man, who had hitherto borne himself with such stoical dignity throughout.

But it did not move Chermanay!

"You waste time, dog!" he snarled. "You can save her yourself, if you wish. Will you tell me of the runaways from the Legion whom you have harboured—or who have passed through your village. Will you tell me where they went, when they left here? Will you tell me of those who sent them here? Tell me these things, and your daughter is safe—refuse, and I'll shame her and you in the sight of all men—aye, and in the sight of this Allah of yours as well! I will give her to my men to play with—and I daresay you know what that means . . . !"

The old man did—and he also realized now that there was no mercy in the heart of his torturer. There was no hope!

His whole demeanour suddenly changed once more. He rose to his feet and, drawing himself to his full height, he hurled his last defiance into the face of his enemy. As he did so his old eyes flashed once more with the fire of fury, and his grey beard seemed literally to bristle:

"Dog of an Unbeliever—I have told thee that I know nothing, and if that is so, how can I tell thee what thou wouldst know? Do thy worst, thou filthy pariah of the Feringhees! And may Allah do no less unto thee! May he curse thee and thine, in all that thou thinkest, and sayest and doest, now and through all Eternity! May he . . . !"

Then someone felled the old man with a brutal blow, and Chermanay made a gesture to Moughliff—nodding towards the terrified, shrinking girl. The great, gorilla-like fellow gave a grunt of

satisfaction, and shambled towards his helpless victim. His long arms went out to seize her. . . .

And then the astounding thing happened!

McNiel had been sitting his horse like a statue, but his brain had been in a ferment. This girl—God, it might have been Carol! That was what seemed to sear into his brain. He even fancied an actually facial resemblance between them. . . . Words that Carol had said to him seemed to reverberate inside his brain: "The only real sin is to be afraid . . . !"—and words she had written to him: "What is of more importance—your MANHOOD!"

How could he retain his manhood, if he let this horror happen? And what was preventing him from stopping it? Fear . . . ! Fear of losing Carol for ever . . . for he knew too well the consequences of interference—the Penal Battalion . . . !

Then it came to him that if he sat inactive and permitted this fearful thing to take place, he would lose Carol more surely than by merely never seeing her again! For even if he went to her, every time he took her in his arms he would see the vision of that pretty creature, struggling helplessly—futilely—in the arms of that great brute . . . !

And so it was that as the two arms of Moughliff went out to grasp his prize, the right arm of McNiel was raised also. There followed a sharp report, and, with no more than a sigh, the chief's daughter crumpled at the knees and fell, and a little of her blood stained the sand by her head! McNiel was a dead shot!

There followed a moment of amazed, breathless silence. It was broken by the voice of the chief, raised to a high, screaming note:

"Allah bless thee, soldier! Allah bless thee and thine, now and forever!" And then the old man, overcome by the strain, fell to the ground in a swoon.

Chermanay turned slowly in his saddle and stared around him. His eyes fell on the smoking revolver in McNiel's hand. His face darkened until he looked as though he were going to collapse in a fit. Then he spurred his horse towards McNiel.

But before he could get to him another diversion occurred. Moughliff, the Russian, had been balked in his desire, and he was like a wild beast whose bone has been suddenly snatched away from it! Just at that moment the cause of his loss filtered through his dull mentality, and, with a scream of insensate rage, he made a rush at McNiel, his great feet thundering on the sand like those of a mad bull. And then, for the first and only time during those tragic incidents, McNiel smiled. But it was not a very pleasant smile, and as he smiled he deliberately lifted his revolver again and, with nicety, sent a bullet straight into the centre of that low, bestial forehead!

As the Russian fell, Chermanay reached McNiel's side. He was so furious he could hardly speak, but at last he managed to hiss:

"You mutinous dog! How dare you? *Mon Dieu*, but you shall smart for this!"

McNiel, staring his officer calmly in the face, was thrusting his revolver back into the holster. Chermanay, in his fury, raised his arm and struck him a flat-handed blow across the face, with such force that McNiel reeled in his saddle. When he recovered himself—which was instantly—he leaned

forward and said one word—a word that the officer could understand—from between his teeth. Then his fist shot out, catching Chermanay right on the point of the jaw, and knocking him clean out of the saddle and onto the sand below, where he lay motionless—out for the count!

Then McNiel wheeled his horse, and striking spurs into her, sent her careering madly into the sun, and away from that scene of horror.

The sub-lieutenant gave a sharp order. Two or three rifles were raised, levelled in the direction of the flying man.

McNiel felt a jar beneath him, and heard the gallant beast he bestrode give a sort of cough. Next moment he was rolling over and over in the sand, and before he could rise, half-a-dozen men were on top of him, tying him up.

CHAPTER XIII

"HE COMETH NOT!" SHE SAID

THE Riffs were, and still are, for that matter, a very primitive people. They fought the French because, in the first place, they thought the French intended to invade and annex their country and in the second place because, as we have shown, they took the diversity of nationalities to be found in the French Foreign Legion to mean that the French had stirred up the whole of the Infidel World to attack the Sons of Allah!

They fought with a bravery and cunning which was admirable, and their organization, under the able direction of Ab-del-Krim, their educated and enlightened leader, was truly remarkable. When they started their campaign against the French they possessed only a few native guns, mostly more dangerous to the man who fired them than to the man they aimed at, and their knives. But when, after the surrender of Krim, they came to give up their arms it was found that they possessed no fewer than 40,000 rifles, 135 cannon, 240 machine-guns, and a large quantity of bombs and ammunition. A certain amount of this war-material had been purchased as contraband, but the majority of it had been captured from their French and Spanish foes.

It was a great effort on the part of a small, and very primitive race.

But, excellent as their organization was, there was one important factor in military operations which they entirely neglected—for in the whole of the Riff country there was not one doctor, nor any sort of hospital, when the campaign broke out. Such wounded as could not drag themselves away from the field of battle were left to their fate—and those who could crept into their own huts eventually, and waited until they either recovered or died!

The only serious attempt to deal with the problem of the sick and wounded was represented by the rough hospital which Carol Royston organized in the Secret City, and the fame of this place soon spread abroad, especially after Doctor Norton arrived on the scene. Originally, Carol had started it partly because the sight of the maimed, helpless men going untended moved her to sympathy, and partly because time hung heavily on her hands and she had to do something to prevent her continually moping over Jimmy McNiel.

At first her "hospital" was a very modest affair, but with the coming of Norton things changed for the better. More huts were commandeered or built, and it was not long before these two industrious workers had a hospital capable of accommodating 100 men—and double that number attached to their "out-patients' department."

In the beginning they had no drugs, and no instruments. But Norton knew something of herbalism, and so some simple drugs were compounded, and, with the aid of an old sword-maker, he managed to get some crude scalpels, probes and so on made. That the hospital was of great value,

and that many lives were saved and much suffering alleviated, there can be no doubt.

The Riffs are a hardy race. They take their wounds philosophically, like the fatalists they are. Tending wounded and sick men they regarded as women's work, and so it was that Norton and Carol (whom they believed to be both of the male sex) were looked upon with a sort of tolerant contempt by the fit men. But from all parts of the Riff country wounded men came to them to be healed, and very soon Carol found herself with hardly time to sleep, and none at all to think!

But there came a day when thought was thrust upon her! She rose extra early that morning, after about four hours' sleep only. There were some very bad cases in the hospital, cases that needed constant skilled attention, and could not be left in the charge of any of the native assistants they had enrolled. Carol had been up the whole of the previous night, and on this occasion Norton had compelled her to go to bed, while he kept watch.

"You must be sensible!" he told her. "The first thing a good doctor must learn is to look after himself, or how can he look after others? Besides, if you crock up, I shall never be able to cope with all this work by myself!"

"I daresay!" Carol protested. "But you've been working just as hard as I have, and you've had no more sleep!"

"Maybe not!" he said, without thinking. "But then I'm a man, and I've no beauty to lose through lack of sleep!"

It was the first compliment Carol had had for a very long time, for in working hours Norton was

apt to either forget or ignore her real sex, so she could be excused for clutching at it!

Now she arose just before dawn, and hurried into the hospital "main building" just as the sun leapt into the blue of the heavens.

"Well?" she laid her hand gently on the shoulder of the nodding, exhausted Norton, who awoke with a start.

"Still alive, both of 'em!" he told her. "And I think there's a chance yet! If No. 6 gets restless, give him some of the brown stuff in that bottle! It's pretty awful dope, but he's got to be kept quiet somehow, or it'll be all up with him!"

"All right!" said Carol. "I'll remember!"

Norton rose, took one last look at his two patients, and walked wearily out of the "ward," his feet dragging as he went, like those of a man who is nearly "all in."

Left alone, Carol also took a look at the two patients on the danger-list. "No. 5" was an oldish man, with an ugly, scarred face. He had had small-pox at some time, and that had not improved his appearance. But "No. 6" was a very different proposition, for he was not only young, but handsome—and exceptionally handsome at that. His eyes were closed, but his brows were even, and his lashes long, and as delicately curled back as those of a girl. The mouth, too, was not over-large, nor were the lips thick, while his nose was almost Grecian in its purity of outline. His skin was smooth, and of the palest brown. Carol wondered if he had white blood in his ancestry somewhere—and, woman-like, she decided that he was much too handsome to die! She'd have to save him, somehow!

She took a glance at the other patients, many of whom were awake. She passed down the line of pallets, bending here and there to ask a patient if he wanted anything, and occasionally giving one or another a drink of water, or goat's milk. They bore their pain with wonderful stoicism, these ignorant mountaineers, and, although the Riffs are not a smiling race, there were smiles for Carol, and faint, hoarse requests to Allah, the All-Giving, to bless the young man whose hands were as gentle as those of a woman!

Finally, after another look at Nos. 5 and 6—both sleeping tranquilly, Carol sat down in the roughly-constructed chair which stood close to their beds. Beside the chair there was a table, and on this she rested her elbow, leaning her head against the palm of her hand. She began, as always in her few idle moments, to think of Jimmy, and then. . . . The sweet-sadness of her thoughts, and the fact that she had not had sufficient sleep for many days did their combined work, and she dropped off into a dose.

She was awakened by a strange noise. For a moment she did not realize where she was, and then, as she looked dazedly about her, she saw that the noise had emanated from No. 5, who was writhing on his pallet in a sort of spasm. She sprang to his side, but, even as she got there, the lean body relaxed, and fell limply back on the pallet, eyes wide and staring, and jaw dropped.

She knew the signs too well! Number 5, for whose life she and Norton had been battling for three days, was dead!

All trades and professions have their own special

disappointments, but it is doubtful whether any defeat is so bitter, or any disappointment so poignant, as that felt by the doctor or nurse when Old Death, with whom they have been battling with all their skill and strength, steals a march on them in the end, and snatches away the life for which they have been fighting so earnestly!

To Carol, work-wearied and over-strained, this particular instance was a really terrible blow. She felt, too—with the unreasonable pessimism of women—that she was responsible for his death. She had committed the cardinal sin of sleeping while on duty! Had she been awake she might, she told herself, have saved him . . . !

She dropped back into her chair and, hiding her face in her hands, sobbed silently but bitterly. Her vitality was at very low ebb that morning, and it seemed to her that there was no hope left in life—nothing worth living for any longer! No sign or word from Jimmy—he must be lost to her for ever . . . ! Perhaps he had been angry because she had gone far away like that—not realizing that she could not help herself! Or perhaps—dreadful thought—something had happened to him. Perhaps he was dead . . . !

Oh, dear God, if she could only *know* . . . ! It was the suspense—the never knowing anything definite—the everlasting hope-deferred that was driving her mad . . . !

Into her wretchedness there cut another sound—one which made her spring to her feet and hastily dry her tears. Number 6 was stirring now—weakly but restlessly moving his limbs, and muttering disjointedly as he did so.

In desperate terror lest the grim hand of Death should reach out and clutch him, also, her miseries were forgotten. She hurried to his side. His eyes were wide open—dark, handsome eyes, but now empty and vacant, as they stared glassily at nothing. His dry, cracked lips were moving, and a hoarse muttering came from between them. Disjointed words and phrases in the Riff dialect—references to fights and flights. One minute he was struggling with a foeman, the next, apparently, running for his life!

Carol gave him a sip of milk-and-water, which he took greedily, and laid her cool, firm hand on his burning forehead, murmuring to him as she did so, like a mother crooning to her child. For a few minutes he was soothed, then his excitement commenced to increase, and his mutterings became a babble. He was racing across the desert—there was somewhere he must get to—quickly—quickly . . . !

Carol's alarm increased. She knew there was danger of hemorrhage, this restlessness must be stopped! She remembered Norton's instructions, and hurried across to the "medicine cupboard" (an old packing-case) from which she selected a bottle (which had once held whisky) containing a quantity of dark brown fluid, and a tin spoon.

She went back to the bedside, and, filling the spoon with the liquid, held it to the young man's lips. As before, he drank eagerly, for the thirst of fever was on him. He coughed at the draught, but its effect was speedy. The continuous flow of babble faded off to a spasmodic murmuring, and the restless movements of his limbs became fainter.

Presently his eye-lids, as though dragged down by some heavy weight, slowly drooped over his eyes, and his breathing became more regular.

Carol, with light, delicate touch, smoothed the bedclothes over him, and made the rough pillow more comfortable. And then, as she bent over him, she caught the last whispered words of his rambling:

"I have seen Jimmy, and he is coming—as—soon—as . . . maybe . . . !"

The voice trailed off into nothingness, and the wounded man slept like a child!

Carol reeled back to the wall, and leaned against it gasping and trying with all her strength not to faint. The ward was blotted out by a wall of darkness before her eyes, in which lights twinkled and whirled. There was a roaring in her ears as of many waters. . . .

At length she regained partial control of herself, and managed to get as far as her chair, into which she sank, trying desperately to get her thoughts into some sort of order, and to realize what had happened.

Could she have been mistaken? Was it possible she had not heard the words aright? Might it not have been just a figment of imagination . . . ? She had been thinking of Jimmy . . . ! Yes, but not at that moment. When she had heard those miraculous words she had been concentrating entirely on the wounded man, and thinking of nothing else. . . . And the words had been unmistakable: *"I have seen Jimmy, and he is coming as soon as maybe!"* They had, of course, been spoken in the Riff dialect, and the one English

word—that magical word "*Jimmy*"—had seemed to leap right out at her . . . !

She realized that she was trying to disprove what she really desperately wanted to prove—that by some amazing, inspired means, those wonder-words had actually been a message for her!

And after all—why not? For long, weary months she had been awaiting a message of some sort, and if Jimmy was really in Morocco, and had wanted to send a message to her, why should not this young man have been his messenger . . . ?

A sudden idea came to her. She fetched the rough bundle of odd scraps of paper which Norton humorously called his "case-book" and hurriedly turned them over to find the notes about "No. 6." Yes, here they were. He had been found, a few days ago, within a mile or so of the entrance to the "Secret City." He had a bullet in his chest, dangerously near the lung, and it seemed that he must have been travelling for some time with that wound in him, for he had roughly bandaged it.

Making for the City with that message when he had collapsed from loss of blood and exhaustion . . . ?

It suddenly came to Carol that the message *was* for her—that this man had remembered it, even in his delirium. . . .

She went down on her knees, and solemnly thanked God for His answer to her prayer!

CHAPTER XIV

“ . . . AS SOON AS MAY BE . . . ! ”

THE room was long, low, and exceedingly ill-built for a hot country. There was a lack of window-space which made it unusually dark and gloomy, and where there were windows the shaft of sunlight came through, cutting the gloom like the fiery swords of Justice—although there was little of justice about that place!

For it was the Court Martial room of the Legion Depot at Meknes!

A Legion *Conseil de Guerre* is, like many things in the Legion, a sort of tragic-farce. The prisoner is guilty before he is brought in, as a rule, and it is a very lucky man who leaves that room without a conviction!

McNiel had been waiting for two months for his *Conseil*. During that time he had not merely been regarded as guilty, but had undergone a number of those tortures peculiar to the Legion—inflicted partly with the idea of breaking his spirit, and partly as an example to others. Striking one's superiors—especially commissioned officers—is not a practice that receives any great encouragement in the Legion!

McNiel, during his period of waiting, had been flogged. He had also endured the torture by wet-sand (which consists of tying a man loosely to a couple of stakes, so that he can neither lie, sit, nor

kneel, and then fastening a sack of wet sand on the back of his neck, the straps securing it being arranged in such a manner that his chin is forced down on to his breast-bone, and he cannot lift his head. This does not sound very bad, but in effect it is an almost inhuman punishment. He had endured, also, torture by salt. This little pleasantry consisted of having his scanty rations salted so that they were not quite, but almost, uneatable. Being desperately hungry, the victim eats his food, despite the salt. As soon as the resultant thirst has had time to get a real hold on him, the unfortunate is chained within sight of a *carafe* of water—but just out of reach of it. He is left there for hours, and occasionally an orderly will allow him to just sip the water—immediately taking it away from him again! Mc Niel saw a man go mad through this torture—that he himself did not was due mainly to his sheer strength of will!

Prisoners awaiting trial by *Conseil de Guerre* were housed, and treated, worse than animals. They were kept in dirty cells, given filthy, verminous loose straw to lie on, chained, and hardly ever allowed to wash—the result being that when they appeared to stand their trial, they were dirty, unkempt and hang-dog looking, and usually suffering from an inferiority-complex which made them appear guilty, even though they might in fact be completely innocent!

In the case of Mc Niel, all the physical tortures they could inflict upon him did not have half the effect of the mental torture he suffered from knowing that, by what he had done, he had lost all chance of seeing Carol for a number of

years, if ever again! For it might be difficult to desert from the Legion, but to escape from the Penal Battalion was almost impossible!

In his case there was no question about his guilt. He pleaded "guilty, but under great provocation." The President of the Court told him that was no sort of plea—he was either "guilty," or "not guilty" . . . there could be no half-way line!

"Then I plead 'Not Guilty'!" retorted McNiel, stoutly.

The evidence was heard. It was brief and to the point, though all the details were not given. While Captain Chermanay was interrogating an important prisoner, a female, the prisoner, apparently objecting to his methods, pulled out his revolver and shot the woman dead. Thereafter, when remonstrated with by Captain Chermanay, the prisoner struck him a terrible blow, rendering him unconscious.

Such was the slightly bowdlerized version given by the prosecution. From the way his judges looked at him McNiel realized that there was little mercy for him here—and, since he knew that he was technically guilty, mercy was the best thing he had to expect!

When he was asked what he had to say in his own defence, he had his one opportunity, and he took full advantage of it!

After describing exactly what had occurred, he added:

"I am a soldier! My record in other armies, which lies before you, is not a bad one! It is not one of which any soldier need be ashamed! This is

the first occasion upon which I have ever had to face a charge of insubordination, or even of dereliction of duty! But, as I have said, I am a soldier. To be a good soldier, one has first to be a man! But to stand by and see an innocent young girl—a mere child, in fact—ruthlessly and brutally outraged in the vilest manner, not only in public, but before the eyes of her aged and helpless father, requires something less than a man! I do not regret that I shot that child! I do not regret that I lost my head, and struck the officer, but I was beside myself with rage at what I had witnessed! One thing more—it seems to me that I, as a soldier of France, am pledged to uphold in every way that lies within my power her honour and integrity—and such a deed as would have been done on that occasion, but for my interference, would certainly reflect very poorly upon both! I consider that by doing what I did, I did no more than my duty as a soldier of France!”

This little speech was spoken deliberately and impressively, and it obviously had its effect upon one or two of the younger officers present. But the President of the Court—a grizzled old Colonel, with a face like a chip of granite, leaned forward in his chair:

“You will not help your case, prisoner, by attempting to malign the honour of the country you have elected to serve, or by criticizing the conduct of your superiors! But, even supposing that all you say is correct, you, as a trained soldier and an ex-officer yourself, should know better than to have the insolence, as a mere non-commissioned rank, to set yourself up as a judge of the morals of

your Commander!" And then, addressing the guards: "Remove the prisoner, while the verdict is considered!"

And as McNiel moved away between his guards, with his chains clanking dismally as they hurried him to the adjacent cells, it seemed to him that a darkness was enveloping his whole life through which the sun could never shine again!

Hundreds of *kilometres* away, by strange contrast, the girl he loved so devotedly was living in the seventh heaven of delight—or, at any rate, the sixth, since he himself was not actually there! For on this fateful morning Carol had, at last, been given permission by Norton to have a real talk with the invalid known as "Number 6." For weeks she had been waiting and longing for just this opportunity to hear the truth about that strange sentence he had murmured in his delirium. But it could not be done until he was really well enough to talk, and, what with the agony of fear lest he should die without speaking (and there was a time when he came very near to doing just that!) and the torture of wondering, wondering whether there was really anything in it or not—whether this man really had seen "Jimmy," and whether, if so, it was *her* Jimmy—Carol had been almost distracted! Her nerves had suffered severely from the strain, and she had been forced to keep away from "No. 6" after he had regained normal consciousness, for fear she should lose control of herself and ask him the questions that were burning on the tip of her tongue, and thus do him harm.

And now, at last, she had full permission to approach him on the matter.

As she went up to his bed, and he turned his head to look at her, she saw that he was even better looking than she had thought at first, when his dark, handsome face had been twisted and contorted by his pain and his delirium. He greeted her with a keen glance from his dark eyes, and she knew he was wondering why she had never come near him before.

In somewhat halting terms—for it was, in its way, a difficult explanation to make—she told him why she had seemed to avoid him, while tending the others so assiduously. As he listened to her he suddenly showed signs of excitement, which made Carol thankful she had not approached him sooner, when such emotion might have been definitely dangerous!

"Why," he exclaimed. "Of course—how foolish does the weakness of a wound make one! Thou art the youth Kar-olle, son of the chief, Roy-es-stone, is it not so?"

"I am he!" Carol answered, striving desperately to keep her intense anxiety from showing.

"It is well!" said the young man. "My name is Ahmed Heriro, and, as you doubtless know, I am one of the lieutenants of Sid Mahommed Abdel Krim, whom Allah preserve. And it was to see you that I came here, wounded as I was, and to bear to you a message that was given to me in a strange manner!"

"Yes! Yes!" in her excitement Carol leaned forward and gripped his wasted hand in both hers. He looked at her with an expression of mingled

kindliness and regret—the regret being that this beautiful creature (for McNiel had given away her true sex very completely in the course of their interview!) should be wasted upon an accursed Infidel!

"This message," Heriro went on, "was given to me by an Infidel—a soldier of the French, in their Foreign Legion—which may Allah, the All-Powerful, destroy utterly!" And then he went on to tell her, with merciful brevity, the full story of his capture by McNiel, the interrogation, and of his final release and mission to her—which he had now faithfully discharged.

"Tell me," she begged him, when he had finished his tale, her face aflame with the delight that surged within her bosom, "tell me how did he look? Was he well? Did he seem happy?"

The young Riff smiled again. There was an almost fatherly understanding and tolerance in his dark eyes—and still that vague regret . . . !

"Lean and healthy as a young cedar tree!" he told her. "And I can speak for his strength, since he broke my head for me!" he added, ruefully.

And then it was that, in the excitement and delight of the moment, Carol was guilty of an indiscretion.

"Why, what a real darling you are!" she cried, in English—and simultaneously she leaned over and impulsively kissed the invalid upon the lips.

Then, realizing what she had done, she gave vent to an "Oh!" of horror, and drew back from him.

Beneath the darkness of his skin it was clear that Heriro was flushing, and into his eyes there flashed

a light that might, had she been a little more clear-headed at the moment, have been a warning to Carol. Then he smiled, and murmured:

"Now indeed am I rewarded, lady, for any small trouble I may have taken in this matter!"

"*"Lady!"*" Carol was gazing at him with dismay in her eyes, and his smile changed to one of reassurance.

"Be not distressed!" he said, gently. "Thy lover had already told me—without meaning to! And, surely, what he left unsaid, thou hast said! But be not fearful—thy secret is safe with me!"

A few moments later Carol literally danced out into the sunshine and the open air, to thank God for this great joy that had come to her! Jimmy in Morocco! Jimmy quite near to her! Jimmy coming to find her—as soon as might be! What greater joy could there be for her than this knowledge, short of the sight of Jimmy himself coming through the entrance-tunnel and rushing to her ready arms . . . ?

As soon as may be . . . !

Had she but known it, at the very moment she was almost dancing with joy at the knowledge of her lover's proximity, he himself was standing very erect, with chains hanging and clanking about him, to face a row of grim-faced men, one of whom, in a hard, toneless voice was saying:

". . . The sentence of this court, therefore, is that you go from here to serve for ten years in the *Bataillon Correctionel*, and thereafter return to serve the unexpired portion of your agreed service in the *Legion d'Étrangers*!"

" . . . AS SOON AS MAY BE . . . ! " 249

And thereafter, heedless of the blows and curses of his guards, he walked back to the cells from which he had come—a man without hope, or desire to live!

"As soon as may be . . . !"

CHAPTER XV

CAROL IS LEFT ALONE

IN the early Spring of 1925, with the sun flaming in an azure sky, and the golden sands underfoot burning like the very flames of Hell itself, a melancholy procession was wending its slow and weary way across the desert, with Taza some two hundred *kilometres* behind, and the Atlas country looming ahead.

The advance guard consisted of a dozen mounted *légionnaires* under the command of a sub-lieutenant. Behind these, after a longish gap, there marched a company of black Senegalese troops (the despised and hated *Goubis*). Immediately following these came as wretched a looking company of human wrecks as can well be imagined! With their gaunt faces, of which the brown, leathery skin was drawn drum-tight over the cheekbones; eyes set in deep hollows; their shaven heads, and their lean torsos, with every rib showing clean beneath the sun-blackened skin, they looked more like a pack of human wolves than anything else!

On their shoulders the majority of them carried tools—spades, mattocks and picks, and as they marched, or, rather, shambled, over the burning sands, there accompanied them always a rhythmic clanking from the chains which fastened them one to another.

They marched with heads down and feet dragging ; their arms—when not engaged in carrying a burden—hanging slackly at their sides. They marched as men without hope in life, and the only time when a little animation stirred their ranks was when one or another of the black (crowning humiliation!) overseers who rode their horses at intervals by the side of them, suddenly struck out with the wicked lash of his great bull-hide whip, and neatly nicked a red gash across the bare back of some malingerer. And even then the stir was an apathetic and purely momentary one!

A detachment of the Penal Battalion were marching to their work!

Behind the chained cohort there marched a full company of Legion Infantry, with their rifles at the slope, and mounted officers at their head—a gay gathering, compared with the living corpses who dragged along ahead of them!

And in the rear again came another detachment of Legion Cavalry, while small groups of the same unit scouted up and down at some distance from the main body—for in this country an attack from the fanatical tribesmen of Ab-del-Krim might be expected at any moment!

Presently there was confusion amongst the prisoners, and some of them halted. A man was down!

A couple of overseers spurred their horses to the spot, and their whips cracked viciously, causing the blood to spurt from the unconscious body of the man who had fallen. But he did not move.

An officer came riding up:

"*Hola!* What is all this?" he demanded, in a raucous, bullying voice. One of the Senegalese overseers answered:

"He is done for, that one, *mon Capitaine!*" he said, callously, jerking his whip at the prone, bleeding body.

Cursing, the officer descended from his horse and bent over the fallen man to look at him, but without touching him. Then he straightened himself, and drove the toe of his heavy riding-boot viciously into the fallen man's ribs.

"*Allez, cochon—marchez!*" he bellowed at him—but neither the kick nor the words elicited any reply.

The officer swore, and then, lugging his revolver from its holster, he put the muzzle to the man's ear and pulled the trigger.

And even when the brains of he who had been their comrade in misfortune splattered over them, the chained men standing nearby never so much as shrank—which says much for their terrible state of apathy!

"See to it, and get on—*toute suite!*" snapped the officer to the overseer, and rode away once more. There was an unlocking of chains, and then a recoupling, and presently, to the accompaniment of shouted orders and much cracking from the overseer's whips, the column of misery commenced to shamble along once more.

But this time they did not march far!

From the left there came a sudden splutter of rifle-fire, and, a moment later, the scouting parties were riding in, shouting as they came:

"*Auz armes—aux armes—les Riff!*"

There was no confusion in what followed—all was orderly, efficient, and almost incredibly quick!

Like herders of cattle, the overseers rode their horses round the prisoners in circles, their whips cracking and flaying all the time, until they had the chained men crowded into a small, compact group, which formed the centre of the defence-formation.

The cavalry formed up around them, dismounting from their horses, and herding these in with the prisoners (two or three of whom, chained and helpless, were badly trampled upon) while they, carbines ready, formed a circle around them. Outside this triple group, the infantry—*légionnaires* and Senegalese—took their stands—front rank kneeling, second and other ranks standing, rifles in their hands, and eyes alert.

All this was done in an incredibly short space of the time, yet none too soon—for hardly had French formed up, than the Riffs were upon them!

Out from among the sand dunes they came—a whirling, yelling mass of utterly reckless riders, firing as they came, and splitting the air with their terrific battle-cry to Allah.

A little in advance rode two men—one a sturdy fellow, of medium height, with a singularly neatly-pointed beard—the other a big fellow, carrying a great scarlet banner, bearing the legend, in Arabic characters: "*Allah Cries for Blood!*"

And the Frenchmen, looking upon this, felt, maybe, a slight pang of misapprehension—for they knew they were face-to-face with one of their most

redoutable and merciless foes—the hitherto undefeated chieftain who was known as “Krim’s White Man.”

A couple of machine-guns in the ranks of the French started stuttering venomously, and the front ranks of the oncoming tribesmen crumpled beneath the deadly fire. But it made no difference! The tribesmen, assured of instant removal to Paradise if they fell, cared no more for the deadly machine-gun than for a child’s toy pistol! The survivors merely yelled the louder and rode the harder.

With a terrific crash which shook the whole formation, they impinged upon the bayonets of the front rank. Yells, howls, shrieks—the screaming of wounded horses—the spluttering of rifles, and the cracking of revolvers—filled the air. The fight was desperate, but short. The Riff, repulsed, galloped away a short distance.

But only to reform—and in the *mêlée* both the machine-guns had been put out of action.

Back again! Charging like veritable fiends, led by that indomitable leader of theirs, whom they called Roy-es-stone.

This time, changing their formation at the last moment, they rode in a sort of wedge, of which their redoubtable leader formed the extreme apex, or point. This time they cut right into the French formation. With his long, curved sabre whirling like an enchanted flail, the chief hacked his way through the infantry, and right into the cavalry lines, his followers hanging close behind him, fighting like madmen.

Then the cavalry horses stampeded, and broke the formation on the other side as, rearing, kicking

and trampling, they forced their way through the densely packed mass of men, doing considerable damage to life and limb in their progress.

Now the whole formation was all-but broken, and it seemed as though victory was certain for the Riffs—when a strange thing happened.

One of the prisoners raised his arm and waved it frantically, at the same time shouting:

“Royston! For the love of God get me out of this, Royston!”

The chief paused, his ensanguined blade hovering uncertainly in the air, and stared around him. Saw the speaker, and stared again:

“For the love of Mike!” he muttered, in English to himself. “It’s McNiel!”

What the result of this strange appeal would have been—what Royston would have done, whether he would have rescued his daughter’s lover, slain him on the spot, or merely left him to his fate—will never be known. For at that moment a sub-lieutenant of cavalry, standing near, saw his chance! He lifted his revolver, and fired point-blank at the Riff chieftain!

Royston made no sound. But his whole form seemed to jump in the saddle. Then his sword arm dropped, and his other hand went automatically to his chest, where the bullet had struck him. He swayed in his saddle, and would have fallen, but the gigantic Aruk, his lieutenant and standard-bearer, hastily put out an arm and supported him.

Half a dozen of his warriors in the immediate vicinity closed around them, and the party turned and forced their way out of the *mêlée*, the rest of the band following.

Once clear of the all-but broken French formation they rode swiftly away, followed by a sputtering fire from the French rifles.

And thus, once more, did Jim McNiel save the day for the French!

The following evening Carol Royston waited for the last time for her father to return from battle—for this time he was carried home on the saddle-bow of the grim-faced warrior Aruk. He was quite dead when they sat him in his rustic arm-chair, in the "parlour" of his little cottage in the Secret City. And to Carol, who had waited for nearly two years in vain for Jim McNiel to fulfil his promise and come to her "as soon as may be" this seemed to be the last blow of Fate.

That night she finally decided that McNiel must be dead, and gave herself over to a despair that mercifully numbed even her capacity for mental pain. For her the world was at an end—the two people to whom she had given all her love were both lost to her for ever, and, so far as she was concerned, nothing left in the world mattered. As to her own fate, she was completely indifferent—which was, perhaps, as well, for, without the protection of her father her situation in that wild country, completely cut off from civilization and at the mercy of a primitive and ferocious people—was likely to be fraught with considerable danger. Especially if her secret ever leaked out!

Had she thought about it at all, she would have realized, however, that she had three firm friends, any and all of whom would remain staunch even to the death. Two of them because they were in

love with her, and one of them because Jimmy McNiel had been!

For the faithful Nippo was now a citizen of the Secret City.

When he emerged from hospital at Meknes, he heard what had happened to McNiel—who, by that time, had received his sentence and had gone to serve the first part of it back at Fort St. Jean, that ill-omened pile in Marseilles.

It was a terrible blow for Nippo, but, at first, he did not despair. He racked his cunning Cockney brains for some plan to enable him to rescue his chum, but it was slowly borne upon him that this would be impossible while he remained in the Legion. In order to get near McNiel, and thus to make any attempt at rescue, he *must* have freedom of movement. That was essential—and the only way he could obtain it was by deserting at the very first opportunity.

And, by luck, this came speedily. He was accosted by the same old Arab who had approached McNiel, and who arrested his attention immediately by asking him:

"Art not thou the friend of *Adjutante* McNiel, who is now in the accursed French prison?"

For this old Arab was the chief of Krim's secret-service in Meknes—and, by this time, Krim's secret service was a highly effective organization all over Morocco!

The end of it was that, with the aid of the Arab, Nippo quietly vanished from the Legion and from Meknes, and appeared a little later in the Secret City as a recruit for Krim's "Foreign Legion." Although his "underground railway" for getting

deserters out of the country had been a great success, Krim's "Foreign Legion" had not flourished so well. Most of the deserters had one end only in view—to put as many miles between themselves and French territory as possible! And the knowledge of what their fate would be if recaptured by the French after fighting for the Riff was sufficient to deter most of them from joining the army of the Riff Chieftain. The result was that, soon after Nippo joined them, the "Legion" was disbanded. A large number of the men made their way across the Spanish border, and so out of the country. The few that were left were distributed as officers amongst the forces of Krim.

The meeting between Nippo and Carol was a rather strained one. Nippo resented her as the person who had led his chum astray, and had got him into his present trouble. On the other hand, as she was so precious to Mc Niel, it followed that she must also be precious to the loyal Nippo! He was able to satisfy her hunger for news of her lover, and many was the hour they sat together talking of him. She was dismayed at his misfortune, but by no means in despair. For she was quite certain that, sooner or later, he would be able to make his escape and come to her—she had no real conception of what the Penal Battalion was really like! Nippo had, and was by no means so sanguine of his friend's chances! But that did not stop the optimistic little Cockney from continually racking his brains for some practical plan of rescue!

So it was that, while in a sense he resented her, yet for his chum's sake Nippo would have fought, and if necessary died, most cheerfully for Carol!

Carol's second staunch adherent was, of course, "Doc." Norton. He was a good fellow, and he was in love with her. He never bothered her over it, but he made no secret of it, and she was quite aware of his feelings. She had a great affection for him, and was as kind to him as she dared to be. He, on his part, knew perfectly well that he did not stand a dog's chance while Mc Niel lived, and accepted that fact with a calm philosophy. In the meantime he would have positively welcomed an opportunity of dying for the girl he loved—certainly he would sooner have done that than have faced the prospect of living without her. In the meantime he lived, a trifle ashamedly, on the secret hope that Mc Niel might not survive his ordeal in the Penal Battalion!

The third of the trio was also its dark horse. This was none other than Ahmed Heriro, now holding a very high and honoured position in the service of Krim—being, in fact, one of his principal lieutenants.

When Carol had imprinted that impulsive kiss upon the lips of the wounded Riff, she had ignited a train which could, in the natural course of events, end only in an explosion! Heriro was a brave and honourable man, and, for one of his race, an exceedingly enlightened one. But he was a *man*, and the touch of those warm, soft lips on his own had left an impression on his fiery heart that nothing could ever erase. In short, he fell in love with Carol at that moment, and secretly determined that, if Allah was merciful, she should sooner or later be his bride!

As for Carol, to her Heriro was a handsome,

charming young man—a picturesque and interesting figure, with a pleasurable touch of romance about him. But, more than that, he was a man who had met, and known, McNiel, and who had done them both a service. As such he was entitled to her friendship, and she gave him this unstintingly—entirely unconscious of the passionate fire that burned within him.

Heriro was at Tanguist, Krim's headquarters, when he heard the news of Royston's death—and immediately he realized that this was his opportunity! For if Royston was dead, *and if McNiel also was dead*, then Carol was left, helpless, in a strange country where he could help her and protect her far better than anybody else . . . !

Heriro acted swiftly. Actually he had continually kept himself posted, through Krim's secret service organization, of every movement on the part of McNiel, and was aware that he was even now proceeding to help, with his fellow-convicts, in the construction of the new extended outpost, up beyond Beni Hoef, and well within striking distance of the Riff country. Therefore he knew also that, with a certain amount of determination and possible sacrifice, he might be rescued!

To his credit be it said that he even contemplated the possibility of doing this—but the temptation to get Carol for himself was too strong, and he fell back upon a more cunning, but less creditable plan. He found a deserter from the Legion who had just come in, and bribed him to go to the Secret City, and there to seek an interview with Carol and convey to her Jimmy McNiel's "last message,"

saying that he had been killed in that same fight wherein her father had met his end!

And so, a couple of weeks after her father's dead body was placed before her shuddering eyes, she heard authentically, as it seemed, of the death of her lover!

So great had been her previous despair and hopelessness, that the confirmation of her worst fears seemed to have little outward effect on her. Norton, hearing the news, suffered from mingled emotions. That Carol should be hurt, hurt him also, bitterly—but the death of Mc Niel meant the one great chance for him, and, guilty though he felt, he could not restrain the wave of joy at the news that made his heart sing within him!

Heriro, who, despite his fiery, passionate nature, had waited so long, could wait a little longer! So he allowed a decent interval to elapse before, about a week after the last terrible blow had been received by Carol, he set out, magnificently mounted and caparisoned, to visit the Secret City.

The first person he saw there, after passing the guard in the tunnel, was Nippo, to whom he had been previously introduced by Carol, and who was now in Royston's place, in command of the wild riders of the city. Heriro expressed great surprise and regret on hearing the news about Mc Niel. But he was a little discomfited by Nippo's attitude, for that loyal and optimistic soul resolutely refused to believe that his pal was no more.

"I know that he lives!" he assured Heriro, speaking in the Riff tongue, in which he had now acquired considerable fluency. "I do not know why—but something within me tells me so! He is alive—

and sooner or later I will rescue him yet!" And then he added, in a tone of gloom which was infinitely more comforting to Heriro: "But *she* will not believe it! She was sure he was dead even before we heard about it!"

"*Bismillah!*" commented Heriro. "All things are as God pleases!"

And he rode off, with set face, to find Carol.

When he did find her, he lost no time. He expressed his deep sorrow at the death of her father, and a little less at the news about McNiel—after which he came right to the point:

"*Marshallah!*" he said. "All things must be as God has pleased, nor can the will of Allah by any means be wrong, bitter though it may sometimes seem to us! But now, since all that is is, and cannot be altered, there is nothing to be gained by useless grief and sorrowing over the past. It is to the present and the future our eyes must be turned . . .!"

He went on to briefly outline the perils of her present position, now that her father was dead, and there was no hope of her lover ever coming to her; alone in that wild and lawless country, with the dogs of war snarling all around her! He finished by offering her his heart and hand, speaking all the time with the most admirable calmness and self-possession. It was only at the end that he gave any indication of his real feelings:

"For thou, O Flower of the World, hast made me love thee!" he told her. "Many moons ago thou didst light in my heart a fire which only the waters of death can quench! From that moment when, in thy joy at news of another, thou pressed

thy lips, which are like the deep-scented flowers of Paradise, to mine, I have loved thee! To me thou art as the sun, and the wind, and the skies—without thee I am lost indeed—a blind man wandering alone in the cold! That now thou lovest me not, I know—but it will come! When I have the right to hold thee in my arms, the fire of the love which is burning me up within, must flow into thee, so that together we will live in a veritable flame of love! Consent to be mine, Kar-olle, my beloved—wed me, and thereafter I will do whatsoever thou dost wish—for always thy lightest desire is my ambition! Even will I leave my own country, and my own people—aye, even now in their hour of need—and will come with thee to this Am-er-ik-a of thine, there to work for thee as the white man works for his wife!” And then he ended this speech on an almost childish pathetic note: “For, after all, Kar-olle, star of my life, I am not really so much blacker than those of thine own people who have lived long in the sun!”

Carol was shocked—but she was also touched. Though she did not realize it, the scene did her good, for it was almost the first time, since the double blow had fallen upon her, that she had been moved at all from her apathy of misery!

Now, with sorrow in her eyes, and little tears hanging on her lashes, she put her hand on his arm and whispered:

“O, Ahmed! I am so sorry—I—I never dreamed that you—you felt like this about me . . .?”

“Didst thou not?” he smiled at her. “Then can I hide my feelings better than I had thought. But

what matter—thou knowest now—if thou needest further proof . . . !”

He made a sudden movement towards her, his arms outstretched to take her in them. But she stopped him with a gesture:

“No, no!” she cried. “You don’t understand! Almost all that you have said to me has already been said by Doctor Norton—and because he is a good man, and almost of my own country, and because it does not much matter what happens to me, now—I—I have promised to marry him!”

Heriro stiffened, and stared down at her like one who stares at a ghost:

“Thou—thou art going to wed *him*—the medicine-man—rather than *me* . . . !”

Apart from anything else, it was the biggest blow his youthful conceit had ever experienced!

“Yes!” Carol spoke quickly and agitatedly now. “You—you see—well, to start with (forgive me, Ahmed) we are of the same colour—almost the same race. And—and, well, you see we are going to work together in the New York slums—*bazaar*, you know—where, perhaps, I shall be able to forget. But I am so sorry, Ahmed—I do hope you will soon forget me . . . !”

But already he had turned and was striding away. Her reasons for what she proposed to do were quite beyond his understanding—but what he *did* understand was that he had lost her. Perhaps because he had delayed too long in coming . . . !

He found a quiet, secluded spot, behind the “hospital,” and stood there fighting the pain that tore at his passionate heart. He was standing there

when he saw Norton, all unconscious of his proximity, striding towards the "hospital." For a moment Heriro's hand strayed to, and toyed with, the butt of the silver-mounted pistol in his sash. Then he said to himself: "Surely, thou hast already lied and sinned in this matter—and where has it placed thee? Shall I then add murder to my sins . . .?"

The hand dropped from the pistol-butt, and Norton, all unconscious of how near he had been to death, disappeared inside the building! Heriro turned his face to the heavens, and communed with his God: "O, Allah, to whom the secrets of no man's heart are hidden, Thou knowest I have sinned, both against Thee and against those who were my friends! It would seem that I am to suffer for these sins, O, Allah the All-Merciful, yet I would pray Thee to show me how I may atone, so that my conscience may be at ease, though my heart must remain empty and desolate . . .!"

And then, even as he breathed this prayer, an idea flashed into his mind, so that it seemed to him that Allah had answered his prayer immediately.

After a moment's thought, Heriro turned on his heel and went to see Carol again. He found her where he had left her, weeping bitterly. He laid a hand gently on her shoulder:

"If thou art weeping for me, Kar-olle, thou canst dry thy tears. I am a soldier, and the wounds of such soon heal! But forgive me if I was rude and churlish just now—I was not quite myself!"

And then, after a little talk, he asked her, quite casually:

"When dost thou wed the medicine-man, Karolle?"

She told him that there was, at that moment, in Tanguist, a Catholic missionary. He was to be asked to visit the Secret City, that he might marry them as soon as possible.

"Then, by Allah, there is no time to lose!" was the thought in Heriro's mind, as he left the woman he loved and hurried off to find Nippo.

CHAPTER XVI

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS!

WORK was already far advanced on the new outpost-fort when the reinforcements, saved from decimation at the hands of the Riff (though quite inadvertently) by McNiel, marched up.

Already the concrete shell of the main-building had been erected, and beneath it, in the foundations, there had been built some small, airless dungeons, almost like concrete graves.

After a rest and *soupe* the new contingent, including the prisoners, were lined up for inspection by the Commandant—who, as soon as he set eyes on him, brought a surge of black hate into the heart of McNiel, for he was none other than Chermanay himself, McNiel's evil genius, now promoted to the rank of Major!

McNiel had thought himself past all mental suffering, at any rate, but the realization that he had further robbed his beloved of what little happiness might be left to her by causing the death of her father (for he was pretty sure that Royston had been taken off the field a dying man) was causing him incredible agony, and the irony of knowing that he was now comparatively close to her, and yet unable to get to her, brought him to the verge of madness.

And the sight of Chermanay's dark, evil face was almost the last straw!

"That," remarked the Captain who had commanded the reinforcement column, and who was with the Commandant, "That is the man who called out to the Riff leader!" And he pointed full at McNiell.

"Aha!" said Chermanay—and, as he spoke, McNiell slowly raised his head and looked him in the eyes!

For a moment the two enemies stared at each other, and neither of their glances faltered or flinched. Then Chermanay said:

"So, you dog, you are on speaking terms with the enemies of France, are you?"

McNiell suddenly drew himself to his full height, and, for the first time for a very long time stood, erect and defiant, as a soldier should.

"Maybe!" he answered. "But I would call the Captain's attention to the fact that—*once more*—I saved the day for France!"

Such a reference to the incident which had first started the enmity between these two was a defiance indeed, rendered none the less so by the fact that it was a defiance which only Chermanay could understand!

"So?" he said, softly, his eyes still fixed on those of McNiell. "They have not broken your spirit yet, eh, *mon ami*? Well, well—I must see what I can do!"

Surprisingly, McNiell suddenly burst into laughter—a high-pitched, almost screaming laughter that was rather unpleasant to hear. The fact was that the recent strain, coming on top of all he had gone through, had been rather too much for him, so that he had become momentarily hysterical.

The Captain looked at him with some dismay:

"*Mon Dieu !*" he gasped. "The fellow is *cafard!*"

Chermanay still stared at McNiel, with an evil smile on his dark face.

"Maybe!" he said. "But we will soon cure that—rest and darkness are an excellent cure for such meagrim! We already have one such case in the 'black hole'—this one shall go to join it!"

He called a *Goubi* sergeant, and gave some orders. Two of the blacks seized McNiel, and, having unfastened him from the main-chain—that which shackled him to his fellow unfortunates—they proceeded to drag him off.

Into the bare, skeleton-like shell of the embryonic main-building of the fort-to-be, and then down a flight of concrete steps. A narrow passage was at the bottom, with four doors, each possessing a small, barred opening, about six inches square, opened off from these.

They took McNiel to the end of the passage, and unlocked the door on the left. By the dim light of the lantern one of the guards carried, McNiel beheld a bare cell, with concrete walls, some twelve feet square. Two sections of the floor were raised a foot or so above the rest, and these, as McNiel knew from past experience of Penal Battalion cells, constituted the beds of the unfortunate inmates. On one of these a man was lying, chained to the wall. He had his head turned to the wall also, and he never moved when the guards roughly pushed McNiel into the cell. Nor did he when they proceeded to attach a new length of chain to his leg-irons, the other end of which was fastened to the

manacles that locked onto McNiel's legs. They then handcuffed McNiel, and to the handcuffs attached another chain, the end of which was locked to a ring-bolt in the concrete wall. After that they went out and left him—in a darkness so intense that it seemed to be solid. For a moment it seemed to him that he was dead, and in a grave! It was characteristic of the mental condition produced by "service" in the Penal Battalion that he felt entirely indifferent about this, and equally characteristic that he did not trouble to speak to his companion in misfortune. A few months in the Penal Battalion produces a complete indifference to everything—except, perhaps, trying to satisfy the pangs of hunger which are always there, and to dodge the cutting lashes of the great bull-hide whips!

So McNiel sat on his bed of hard concrete, in a darkness which was like that of the grave itself, and a silence to match. His head was bowed on his manacled hands, and his thoughts, torturing him like red-hot knives, were of the woman he loved—so close to him as distance went, but so infinitely far away for all practical purposes.

He could see her when they told her of her father's death. For she had loved her rascally father, with a love second only to that she had borne him—McNiel. Now she had lost her father for ever, and she had lost *him*—for ten long years or more, or it might well be for ever also! He wondered if she had ever got his message! If so, he realized that it would make her disappointment more bitter; her sorrow more poignant! He wondered if she knew what had happened to him?

He did not see how she well could, unless Nippo had deserted, and managed to find her in the Riff country . . . !

It was the first time he had thought of that, and now it brought just the faintest ray of hope to his weary and tortured heart. For if she knew where he was she would wait for him—even though it were for the rest of her life . . . !

He made a rapid calculation. When he was released from the Battalion he would be 41, and Carol would be 36 years of age. Getting into middle-age, that, but not too old for them to still find some happiness . . . !

It was significant that this was the first time he had ever really looked forward to a day when he might be released from his torture . . . ! There would still be three years to serve in the Legion—that would make him forty-four, and Carol would be thirty-nine. . . . Still time, though!

Yes, there was just a faint hope. . . . Then he thought of her, situated as she must be now—without the protection of her father, and possibly quite friendless, in a wild, primitive country . . . ! Eventually, she might fall into the hands of the French . . . ! He thought of the little Arab girl he could only save by killing her, and he shuddered until his chains rattled . . . !

The train of his thoughts was suddenly cut into by a voice at his side. It was a hoarse, harsh voice, but it startled him into almost imagining—as he had often done of late—that madness was descending upon him—that he was going *cafard* !

For the voice spoke in English—the English of the educated, public-school-and-varsity man!

It was his companion, he realized in a moment, the poor devil was either mad or delirious, for his babblings were vague, disconnected, and at time almost incoherent.

Sometimes he was talking to business-people, sometimes to some girl he called "Florence." He had been, it seemed, in love with that girl. . . . Another poor devil in the same boat as himself, Mc Niel mused, wretchedly. He spoke to the fellow, and tried to comfort him, but the other took no notice of him:

"It's no good, Florence . . .!" he was saying, brokenly. "You see I must go—it's the only thing I can do, now! I daresay you won't believe it, but I've suffered like the devil ever since this happened! The sacrifice had to be made—it was for the best . . . it was the only thing to do . . . but my part was such a rotten one! You'll laugh—or sneer—at me when I say that, in a way, he had the better part, and the better time . . .!"

His voice died away, and for a moment or two there was silence, broken only by the rattling of the other's chains as he stirred restlessly.

Then, in the darkness, Mc Niel suddenly became tense! He stiffened as he sat, and, holding his breath, heard his heart thumping like a steam-hammer within his breast!

Yet the words that thus arrested his attention were simple enough. The poor beggar seemed to be on a railway station, going a journey:

"No, old man—I must catch this train. You see,

I wired for old Bates to meet me with the car—the Guv'nor won't have a telephone on in the house. . . . No, I must get this one . . . !”

And the reason for McNiel's sudden attention was just this.

His own father, who had old-fashioned ideas, would never have a telephone in his house—and the name of the man who had originally been their coachman, and who afterwards became a sort of coachman chauffeur, was Bates . . . !

Fists and teeth clenched in a wild intensity of listening, McNiel waited for some more. It came, sure enough:

“First-single Bletchley, please . . . and make it snippy, I'm late for the train. . . . Hullo, Bates, getting cold, old man? The damned train's late again—'pon my soul this line gets worse and worse . . . ! How's the old Fiat, eh? She looks well on it—I wonder why the deuce the Guv'nor won't get a new car, anyway? It would do for Cissie and me to use, to say nothing of the *Mater*, even if he didn't want to use it himself! Selfish, I call it . . . !”

In the darkness, with the world rocking about him and a terrible choking sensation in his throat, McNiel reached out a hand—a hand that trembled, as with an ague. He found the other's arm, and got hold of it in a grip that must have hurt, for the other gave it an impatient shake, and exclaimed:

“Hey, old Bates—you've got a grip on you, haven't you, for an old 'un? Anyway, why help me into the car—I'm not blotto, dear old son, if you think I am! Just glad to be home again,

that's all! I say, how're Sphinx and Trotters, Bates . . . ?"

In the darkness before the eyes of McNiel there glowed a picture of two old spaniels, sitting before the fire in the library (their special sanctuary) at Bletchley—and now there was not the slightest doubt . . . !

He gripped the other convict's arm tighter, and whispered:

"Tom! Tom! Don't you know me? Tom, boy, it's your brother Jim. . . ! *Tom McNiel* . . . ?"

The name seemed to drift through the haze of delirium or madness which was clouding the poor fellow's brain. He paused in his babbling, and seemed to be listening:

"Eh?" he said, weakly. "What's that . . . ?"

And again the other whispered, realizing that he had caught his attention:

"McNiel! *Tom McNiel* . . . !"

Silence for a moment, and then the other cried sharply:

"*Adsum*, sir!"

McNiel almost wept. It was no good, poor Tom thought he was back at school again!

For there could be no doubt about it. This man—this poor, ragged devil, chained to a wall and raving like a madman, was Jim McNiel's brother, Tom! The brother for whom—no, it wasn't for him really, it was for his mother—he had, years ago, accepted the blame for a crime that was not his, and had walked out of his parents' house forever.

But what, in the name of Heaven, was Tom doing here—in the Foreign Legion—worse, in the

hell of the Penal Battalion? What had happened? The obvious explanation sprang to Jim's mind—his brother had made the same mistake twice, and the second time there was no Jim to shoulder the blame . . .! So all his sacrifice had been useless—futile—Jim thought, bitterly. And his parents might have been left with at least one son—himself—to look after them. Now they had no one! He wondered if, now that Tom had made a fool of himself again, they realized that he, Jim, had never been guilty. It came to him suddenly that, if that was so, they would be blaming themselves most bitterly—and he hoped they did not realize it. Though, for that proud old man who was his father, and that gentle, sweet lady, his mother, to think that they had *two* sons who were—morally unstable . . . that also would be bitter indeed!

For hours he tried to get sense out of his brother, but he got only incoherent ramblings, which told him little. For a long time—it might have been hours, days, or weeks, for in that place there was neither night nor day, and no means of measuring time—he sat patiently, waiting for his brother to ramble again, so that, possibly, he could patch up some sort of a story from his disconnected babblings. But he slept now, and did not speak—and McNiel, knowing too well the value of even the most uneasy slumber to, the tortured victim of the Penal Battalion, would not disturb him! He even dozed himself, a little, from sheer exhaustion.

He was aroused from one of these dozes by the rattle of bolts and bars, and the door was opened to admit the light of a lantern—which, dim though it was, completely dazzled McNiel's eyes so that,

although he tried to get a look at his brother, he could only get the vaguest impression of a wild, bearded, tatterdemalion figure beside him.

"This fellow here, who is he?" he asked the *Goubi*, who brought lumps of coarse, black bread and a *carafe* of tepid water for each of the prisoners.

"Like you—*cafard*!" snarled the Senegalese. "That's all I know about him!"

"How long's he been in the Battalion, d'you know?" McNiel asked eagerly.

"How the hell should I know? I can't be bothered with learning about you white scum!" And the guard deliberately spat full in McNiel's face, and then laughed tauntingly as McNiel made to spring at him, only to be jerked back by his fetters.

"By God!" McNiel hissed at him, through his teeth. "If I ever get my hands on you, I'll rip your entrails out and strangle you with them!" The *Goubi* laughed again, and McNiel added something which he knew would get him:

"Clear out, you dirty nigger!" said McNiel.

The *Goubi* sprang at him instantly, knocked him down, and kicked him ferociously as he lay—then sprang back out of reach before he could recover himself.

"*Cochon*!" screamed the black at him. "Dirty white pig!"

He went out, slamming the door, and clanging home the bolts. For some strange reason, for all that he had sustained a badly bruised rib, that little *rencontre* with the guard had a cheering effect on McNiel! It gave him a sort of feeling that he was reaching back to his manhood again—reminis-

cent of the days before he became a cowering, whipped dog, on the end of a chain!

His brother was murmuring vaguely at his side. McNiel reached out, and, touching him lightly, found that he was sitting up.

He reached out again, and found the two *carafes* of water. He picked one up, and, putting one hand gently round his brother's shoulders, raised it to his lips with the other hand—not an easy task in the dark.

"Here, old chap, have a drink!" he said, very gently. Tom gave a little gasp, and in his eagerness, spilt some of the water. McNiel, for all that his throat was like a lime-kiln, then gave him most of his own ration.

"A drink, by God, that's good!" said his brother—and then added: "Thanks awfully, old man!"

He spoke in a perfectly normal voice, and McNiel's heart leapt, for it seemed that his senses had come back to him:

"Tom, old man!" he whispered. "I say, you know who I am, don't you?"

Dead silence for a moment, then the other said, vaguely:

"Eh?"

"I said," repeated McNiel, still in a gentle tone, and with the utmost patience, although he was longing to shake his brother into sensibility. "I said—you know who I am, don't you, Tom?"

Another silence, then, in a high, half-hysterical voice, his brother answered:

"Yes, of course I do! Rather! You're God, aren't you? Almighty God, speaking through the great darkness, eh? Yes, and you've been wanting to talk to me for a long time, haven't you? Got

a big bill up against me, eh, for all the wrong I've done, and all that? Well, here I am, now—what about it? But you needn't think you can hurt me much, 'cos you can't! All the hurt's been down to me down there—although I daresay I deserved it!"

A sudden idea came to McNiel. His brother was in that state of half-delirium in which he could understand and answer questions up to a point, although he had no real idea who was asking them. Play up to him, and he might learn some of the things he wanted to know. Anyway, he could try it—might get at something that way:

"Yes!" he replied quietly. "I'm God. But I don't want to hurt you, Tom! I think you've been hurt enough! Hadn't you better just tell me all about it, old chap?"

The other gave a nervous little laugh:

"I say, sir—that's awfully good of you—to speak to me like that!" He paused, and when he spoke again there was a note of cunning in his voice: "Ah!" he said. "But I've got you! I see what you're after—trying to catch me out, eh? Think I won't tell you the truth! Well, you're wrong—I've done with lies a long time ago! A few years of living a lie is quite enough—if you aren't a born liar, that is! I always speak the truth, now, so that's that! Now, what d'you want to know?"

"Just all about it, Tom!" said McNiel, gently.

"Well, I've been a dirty dog, that's all about it! Though I haven't meant to be as dirty as I had to be, you see? Old Jim forced me into it, really, because of the *Mater*—quite right, too, I suppose,

only hard on me in a way! You see, old Jim, he could keep his pecker up by knowing he'd done the square thing—I couldn't! I just felt a rotter—a bigger rotter than I really was, you see? But the joke was, really, that it was all a mistake—all futile! You see, we'd always been under the impression that the *Mater* cared more for me than for Jim—that I was the apple of her eye, so to speak! And so, when I made a fool of myself—quite honestly, it wasn't anything worse, I didn't mean to be wicked—and did something that disgraced the family name, old Jim said it would be better, for her sake, if he took the blame! You see, I just told Jim, and nobody else! Jim was like that—you could tell him things! The finest fellow you ever made, God! Yes, well—Jim said that if the *Mater* knew it was *me*, it would just about break her heart—and she was in bad health at the time—but she wouldn't mind so much about *him*! And so, for the *Mater's* sake, he made me agree to let him take the blame! He was trying to do me a good turn, not to punish me—but I don't think I could have been much worse punished! To hear people say hard things about Jim, and butter me up, you know—when I knew all the time that *I* was the rotter, and old Jim was the real hero . . .! The tortures of Tantalus were just nothing to it! But, as I said, the tragedy was that we'd made a mistake—it was really *Jim* who was mother's favourite, only she thought it was wrong to have favourites, and so she made too much fuss of me, just to convince herself she wasn't showing any favouritism, if you see what I mean! And then, when Jim went away in disgrace, it just broke her heart . . .! Only

she never said a word to any of us, and she—she . . . !”

“She didn’t—die, did she . . . ?”

The voice that came out of the darkness was so hoarse; so strangled, that the fact of it filtered through into the poor fellow’s hazy brain, and he stopped suddenly:

“I say,” after a pause, “you—you *are* God, aren’t you?”

And Mc Niel, pulling himself together with an immense effort, answered in calm, deep tones:

“Yes, I am God!”

Silently he prayed that the blasphemy, if blasphemy it was, might be forgiven him. Quite apart from what he might learn himself, he saw in this strange situation a chance to comfort his brother, and he could not resist taking it!

“No,” the younger one went on. “I thought you’d know. She didn’t die! But she was terribly ill—sort of slowly fading away, you know! And then I got ill myself—a chill I caught while shooting at Bletchley, where my people live. It turned to pneumonia, and I was delirious—and in my delirium I gave the whole thing away. It was pretty badly on my mind, always, you see—I always felt such a shockin’ scug about it all!”

He was silent for awhile, and Mc Niel had to arouse him with a: “Well, what then . . . ?”

“Well, when I was better, there was a show down, of course! They put it to me, and I made a clean breast of the whole rotten business—and jolly glad I was to do it, too! It was then that I learned how the *Mater* really felt about it, you see! They were

pretty good to me—didn't drive me away, like they did poor old Jim. I fancy that had been a bit of a lesson to them! The Guv'nor employed a good firm of private detectives to find old Jimmy, and it wasn't so difficult, because he'd never changed his name. They traced him to America, and to South America, and all over the shop. Then they found out he'd been in the War—still under his own name—and had got himself a V.C.! You can bet old Jim would do that! Then it seems he went back to South America again, and after awhile, came back to France. The detective fellow just missed him in Marseilles—for he'd joined the Foreign Legion and sailed for Morocco the day before the detective got there! And that was *that*—he was lost for five years. We sent some letters, but he never answered them—so I guess he'd never got them! And then, I just couldn't stand it any longer! So I broke off my engagement—made a clean breast of it to the girl—and just went over to France to join the Foreign Legion myself, so I could stand a chance of meeting old Jim, and explaining matters to him a bit . . . !”

“Good heavens!” gasped the voice at his side. “You did—*that*!”

“Yes, of course!” said the young man, with a touch of impatience, and not noticing the, in the circumstances, strange expletive. “You see, it was a sort of expiation, in a way, and I was glad to do it! I heard of old Jim—he was still using his own name, you know. And then—I got bad news. He'd got into trouble, and had got ten years in the Penal Battalion! So I just got myself into the Penal Battalion, too . . . !”

"You—got yourself into the Penal Battalion? Deliberately?"

"Yes, rather! You see, I was just determined to meet old Jim, somehow!" The young fellow sighed heavily. "But, of course, I shan't manage it now I'm dying!"

"You're—*dying* . . .?"

"Yes, of course I am! I've been dying for some time—these beggars have been a bit too much for me—I was never really strong, you know—that's why I couldn't fight in the War. If I wasn't dying, I shouldn't be talking to you like this, should I?"

"No, I—I suppose not!"

It was only by a tremendous effort of will that McNiel kept the sobs from choking his utterance completely.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Do about it?" McNiel asked, vaguely.

"Yes, of course! I've told you all about it, now—aren't you going to punish me? I've been a pretty nasty sort of rotter, you know!"

McNiel's chance to justify his apparent blasphemy by bringing some real comfort to his dying brother—for he was convinced that the boy in the darkness beside him *was* dying—had come!

"No!" he said, firmly. "I am not going to punish you! You have been punished enough, and, furthermore, you have fully expiated your sin!"

"Oh, I say! That's no end good of you!"

Tears were running down McNiel's face—somehow it was all so amazingly, so fantastically pathetic!

And then, on a sudden, another idea flashed into his mind—a daring experiment which had a bare chance of success. He went on:

"On the contrary, instead of punishing you—tell me, what would you like most in the world?"

The answer came without the slightest hesitation:

"To find old Jim, and have a yarn with him before I go out!"

"Very well, you shall have your wish! I will send your brother to you!"

"You'll do—*what* . . . ?"

"I'll send your brother to you! I am God, am I not? I can do anything that I wish!"

"And you'll do that for me? I say, sir, how awfully decent of you!"

"S-s-sh!" said McNiel, softly. "Keep quite quiet and still, and he will be here in a moment!"

For a few seconds McNiel sat, quite still and silent, pulling himself together and arranging his ideas. He realized that his voice must have changed a good deal, and, when he spoke, he tried to make it sound young once again. He called, suddenly, as one might on finding oneself unexpectedly in the dark:

"Tom? Hullo, I say, Tom . . . !"

With a queer sort of wondering hush in it, the answer came at once:

"Jim! That isn't *really* you, is it, Jim!"

"By George, but it is, Tom! Don't you recognize the voice, you soppy kid?" (The way he had used to talk to him in their school days!)

"I say, isn't that fine! God really did send you, then?"

"Yes, kid—God really sent me!" And McNiel spoke in all reverence! "Here, if you don't believe it's me, get a grip on my flipper—pity we can't see

each other in this darkness, but I guess you'll know the grip . . .!"

And in the darkness the hands of the two brothers met—the one burning as with a fever, the other cold and clammy, with the death-sweat already on it . . .!

CHAPTER XVII

AHMED MAKES AMENDS!

AHMED HERIRO found Nippo sitting on a rock and glooming by himself.

Heriro was essentially a man of action, and, furthermore, one who having once made up his mind, never looked back.

"Take heart, brother!" he cried, clapping Nippo on the shoulder. "And bestir thyself—there is work to do!"

"Allah be thanked for that, anyway!" returned Nippo piously. "Work of what nature, Chief?"

"Work after thine own heart!" answered the Riff. "Tell me, now, how many men hast thou available?"

"Two hundred or more!" affirmed Nippo, with a sudden light in his eyes. "This," he thought to himself, "sounds like a perishin' scrap!"

"It is good!" said Heriro. "Pick one hundred of the best—mount them on your strongest and fleetest horses, and then ride out to meet me, at sundown, outside the walls of Targuist!"

"That's a bet!" cried the excited Nippo, in English, and added, in the same language: "What's the racket, anyway?" Then, remembering himself, he translated his query—broadly—into Arabic.

"This!" replied Heriro. "I have just heard news. Thou wert right, my friend—thy comrade Mack-neel is alive—and not very far away. He is working

as a convict on the new fort which the French are building out beyond Beni Hoef. We are going to rescue him!"

Nippo, rather to the dignified Easterner's astonishment, gave a wild whoop of delight, and, flinging his hat up in the air, first caught it, and then threw it down and jumped on it!

"Blimey! But that's the stuff to gi' 'em!" he shouted. "We'll have the old b—— out of that in no time! *Hooblinkinray!*"

Needless to say, Heriro did not understand a word of this speech, but its purport was obvious. He hastily put in a word of warning:

"Say nothing of this to Kar-olle! We may fail, and it is not kind to raise false hopes!"

"As you say, Chief! But—we shan't fail!"

Nippo picked his men, and his horses. They were both the best specimens of their kind in the Secret City. He personally inspected all rifles and other weapons, and saw to it that nothing was left to chance. Then, whistling a Cockney tune that had been popular in London ten years before, he rode gaily out at the head of his warriors, and headed for Targuist.

Arrived there, with some half an hour to spare, he was surprised to find that something resembling a small army had formed up outside the city. There must have been at least four hundred riders there!

Heriro, in the meantime, had not been idle. He had interviewed the head of Krim's secret service organization in Targuist, and had learned that the total garrison of the fort, including Legion Cavalry and Infantry, Senegalese and Arab troops, and

prisoners, amounted to under three hundred men. And he rode with five hundred!

When, presently, he rode out, with the two or three under-officers who formed his staff, a thundering salute to Allah went up to the evening sky, and, a few minutes later, the column was in movement, and galloping for the desert, with Nippo and Heriro riding in the van.

Heriro was giving Nippo his instructions:

"You will keep your men separate," was his order. "And when we attack, you will have one business, and one only—to find and rescue Mack-neel. And as soon as you have done that, you and your men will ride with him, as fast as your horses can carry you, back to the Secret City, where you will give him to Kar-olle—with my blessings!"

"You won't be with us, then?" said Nippo.

"Likely not—I shall stay to complete the defeat of the accursed French, and, if Allah wills, to slay them all! But your business lies only with the rescue of Mack-neel, your friend! It will be well for you to remember that!"

"No doubt!" retorted Nippo, drily. "But it may not be so easy to make my men remember it!"

Norton was anxious to get his marriage over as soon as possible, for, although his reasons were not altogether selfish, he was haunted by an uncomfortable feeling that even now the cup of his happiness might, at the eleventh hour, be dashed from his lips.

So he indited a further letter—he had already sent one—to the Catholic missionary at Targuist, begging him to come without delay and perform

the ceremony, and pointing out the dangers that surrounded Carol, unprotected as she was in this savage country.

But the circumstances that had brought the priest to Targuist were peculiar. Two of the deserters from the Legion had attached themselves, when their unit was broken up, to the personal service of Krim, who held them both in high esteem. One of them was dying, and, being a Catholic, had a great desire for a priest. So Krim sent a raiding-party into Spanish territory, where they carried off a priest, and brought him along willy-nilly, to perform the last rites for the dying man.

But he had an obstinate tenacity of life, and did not die so soon as had been anticipated. The priest was a conscientious man, and would not leave the fellow until he was dead, and, although he expressed his willingness to marry Norton to Carol as soon as he was at liberty, he would not risk his charge dying in his absence. So Norton had to possess his soul in patience, and hope that the *ex-légionnaire* would die as soon as he conveniently could. Carol was entirely apathetic to the whole affair, except that now she had lost in it everything that she held dear in life, she was desirous of getting out of the Riff country as soon as might be.

And so it was that it was just a week after the departure of Heriro and Nippo before the priest arrived at the Secret City, and the final preparations for the wedding were made. It was, of course, to be a secret ceremony, and it was finally timed to take place on the morning of the seventh day after the rescue party had set out, Norton (who was a Freethinker) being baptised into the Catholic

Church by the missionary on the evening before the ceremony.

As the moment drew near, Norton's spirits soared. It seemed now impossible that anything short of a miracle should intervene to prevent him gaining his heart's desire!

It was in the dark hour before the dawn that the attack on the new outpost was launched. It took Heriro's little army three days of forced marches to get to the place, and then their wise commander ordered a few hours' rest, both for men and horses, before the attack was made.

When the time came it was done with amazing quietness and efficiency. First a picked body of men, crawling along the sand on their stomachs, crept slowly right up, through the barbed wire, and knifed the sentries! Then a second body crept up and, with wire-cutters, made breaches in the barbed-wire entanglements which were the chief defence of the partially constructed fort.

And then, when word was brought to him that all was well, Ahmed Heriro gave the word to attack, and launched his galloping, yelling hordes at the sleeping outpost!

There were no sentries left to give the alarm, and when the ear-splitting war-cry of the Riffs tore the silence of the night the surprise was almost complete!

There were frantic shouts of "*Aux armes ! Aux armes !*", and sleepy men, staggering to obey the order, were shot or cut down before they could do so! The brown horde of attackers broke over the outpost like the angry breakers over a sinking ship.

Chermanay, to give him his due, fought like a hero. Somehow he collected a handful of stalwarts, and took his stand in an angle of the half-built wall, where, with bullet and bayonet, the little band gave an excellent account of themselves. Other isolated groups of *légionnaires* also put up some sort of a fight. The Arabs and Senegalese, for the most part, were shot or cut down as they fled.

Nippo had warned his men of the special task in hand, and, somewhat to his surprise, they stuck to it gamely, and refrained from taking part in the general slaughter which was going on, and which must have been very tempting to them! This may have been due to the fact that Nippo (a trifle optimistically, perhaps!) had explained to them that the man they had come to rescue was a great and a dear friend of their late chief's—whose memory they, to a man, deeply revered.

As soon as they were inside the lines, Nippo led his men to the long, low shed where the Penal Battalion convicts were confined. At the sight of these wild followers of Krim, of whose ruthlessness and ferocity they had heard such terrible tales, the unfortunate prisoners cowered, while Nippo hastened along their lines, with a lantern, scanning the face of every one of the poor, chained wretches. Heriro was with him, he having delegated the command to one of his officers, once he saw that victory was certain.

As soon as he was convinced that McNiel was not there, Nippo was seized by a terrible fear. He had a hasty word with Heriro, and then addressed the frightened prisoners:

"See here, *mes amis*!" he cried, using the bastard French of the Legion. "I'm one of yourselves, really—that is to say I was once a member of the Legion. Now, I want you to tell me one thing, I can promise you that you'll get away with your lives—the chief here has guaranteed that you shall! Somewhere here there's a prisoner named McNiel—one of the new gang who came up the other day. Can anyone tell me just where he is?" He almost held his breath lest someone should say, "He is dead!" But, instead the answer came:

"Yes, I know where he is! But why should I tell you? It would seem we are all going to get our throats cut in a minute or two, anyway, in spite of what you say."

Something in the fellow's accent caught Nippo's attention. He gave him a keen glance, and then rapped out, in his best Cockney-English:

"Wot cheer, cully! Wot part o' the ole village do *you* come from?"

And pat came the answer from his startled compatriot:

"Blimey! Ain't it good to 'ear the ole lingo agin! Dahn Shoreditch way, me? An' you?"

"Oxton, me!" returned Nippo. "Nah, some'ow, I got ter get you blokes aht o' the soup—if only fur ole time's sake!"

He turned to Heriro, spoke a few quick words, got a nod of assent from the chief, and then turned back to the convicts:

"*Mes amis*," he spoke in French again now. "Are you all willing to fight for the Riff against the French?"

The answer was unanimously in the affirmative—and eagerly given at that! Heriro, when this was translated to him, gave an order. The keys were fetched from the guard-house outside, and some of his men got busy unlocking the fetters.

"You can start in on the job right away, then!" Nippo told them, drily. Then, to his brother Cockney: "Nah, brother, spill the beans! Where's this bloke McNiel?"

And the other answered:

"Dahn in the black-'ole—underneath where they're building the fort! Chained up to a stiff, 'e is, too!"

McNiel, sitting in the black darkness, was vaguely conscious of strange noises above. But, having no knowledge of the hour, he took little heed of it. After a time there followed sounds in the corridor. He could hear muffled voices, and the other doors being unlocked. Once he thought he heard a voice say: "Blimey . . .!" but decided that was just part of his madness! For McNiel was on the verge of insanity, and, so far, he knew it!

A rattling of bolts and bars, and the door of his cell was flung open. A voice cried: "Cripes, there 'e is! Wot cheer, Mac, ole son . . .!"

Nippo, staring around the little cell was first aware of a peculiarly unpleasant, and unpleasantly familiar smell—the reek of a corpse some days old! Then he saw McNiel, sitting huddled on the concrete "bed," with his head in his hands. His hair had grown a little, and at first, as he sat there, blinking stupidly at the light, Nippo hardly recognized his chum. When he did he made the exclamation noted

above—and the way McNiel replied to it startled poor Nippo more than anything else.

For McNiel responded in a careless, lackadaisical tone of voice as though he had last seen his friend only a short time before:

“Oh, hallo, Nippo!”

Nippo realized the trouble in a moment:

“Gawd!” he whispered to himself. “He’s nearly crackers!”

They had taken the keys from the guard, whom they had slain at the foot of the stairs. Nippo hurriedly released McNiel from his fetters, and then said:

“What about this other chap—a goner, isn’t he?”

“Yes!” responded McNiel, in an ordinary, drawing-room-conversational tone. “He’s my brother—and he’s dead, all right! I’ve been chained to his corpse for I don’t know how long down here in the dark. . . .”

“Cripes!” gasped Nippo. “How the devil. . . .”

“Oh, that was Chermanay! You see, he’s in command here, and I suppose he thought it would be a good form of torture for me—to be chained to my brother’s corpse in the dark for a day or two. . . .!”

His voice trailed off, as though from sheer boredom. Nippo gave his chum a keen glance. Ignorant Cockney though he was, Nippo knew a thing or two about men whose nerves had gone back on them, and now he got an idea.

He gripped McNiel’s arm so hard that it hurt.

“Chermanay, eh?” he said. “Say, listen—that bloke’s up above, fighting with what’s left of his

bloomin' command. *Wouldn't you like to 'ave a cut at 'im, Mac . . . ?*"

"Wouldn't I . . . ?" For a moment McNiel stared vaguely at his chum—and then, as the suggestion filtered slowly through to his bemused brain, a remarkable change took place. A flicker of light came into the dulled eyes, and the loose mouth tightened. ". . . Have a—have a cut—at him . . . ?" Then he gave a sudden shout: "By God, it's about the one thing I've got to live for! Come on, Nippo—show me where the — is!"

Nippo almost shouted too, in his relief. His little ruse had worked! And, if all went well, a complete cure might be effected very soon!

"Come on, then!" he said, tersely, and led the way out of the cell. McNiel, still dazzled by the unaccustomed light, followed, groping like a blind man. At the foot of the steps, beside the dead guard, there lay the corpse of a Legion cavalryman, his sabre in his hand. Nippo bent and detached the hilt from the dead fingers:

"'Ere—grab this!" he said, handing it to his chum.

"Ah!" breathed McNiel. As his fingers closed around the hilt of the familiar weapon a mist seemed to clear away from his brain. He felt suddenly the strength of ten men within him—and the whole of that strength was concentrated upon one object—vengeance on Major Chermanay!

Out in the darkness and the air, McNiel breathed another deep: "*Ah-h-h!*" Then, looking like a lion that had just entered the arena, or a Spanish bull on the eve of its last great combat, he stared

around him. After the pitch-darkness of his cell, the lesser darkness of the night was as good as daylight to him. As he glared about him, he took in the scene of slaughter and desolation in all its details. Everywhere there were groups of dead and dying men. They lay singly and in grisly little heaps. Some of them still writhed, and cried out in their agony—others lay quite still, mostly in grotesque attitudes. Blood was everywhere. Already, the fighting being all-but over, some of the Riffs were at work with their knives—cutting the throats of those of their enemies who still lived, or committing their abominable mutilations on living and dead alike! It was a ghoul-like, night-marish scene, but it made little or no impression upon McNiel—he was looking for one thing, and one thing only!

And, in a moment or two, he saw it. Only in two isolated spots was any fighting going on now. Against two different angles of the half-built wall little groups of French troops were still holding out—determined not to be captured for the torture they knew must follow, and selling their lives dearly as possible. And, in the midst of one of these groups, McNiel saw the tall form, and heard the harsh voice, of Major Chermanay!

And then, even as he looked, the Riffs made a rush, and the little group of defenders was broken, disintegrated, and swept down beneath their numbers.

McNiel gave a loud shout, and rushed towards the *mêlée*, waving his sabre in the air. Nippo and Heriro stuck close to his heels, and helped him as he forced his way through the crowd of tribesmen,

who were growling and worrying like a pack of wolves as they tore their defeated foemen to pieces! McNiell battered his way through the mob by sheer strength, and liberal use of the flat of his sabre—and only the voices of Nippo and Heriro saved him from a speedy death at the hands of the Riff, who naturally, took him for an enemy!

When, at last, he got through to Chermanay, they had the French officer down on the ground. Half-a-dozen Riffs were holding him, while others were tearing his clothes off. Already a knife was hovering above his helpless form, while he screamed, like a pig in a slaughter house, in anticipation of the horror to follow!

But now McNiell, with a strength almost super-human, grabbed the men who held him, and flung them to left and right, until at last he stood alone over the prostrate man. He looked a horrific figure as he stood there—his naked torso bespattered with blood, his hair wild, and his eyes horribly bloodshot and alight with a fire akin to that of madness.

"Who is Chief here?" he roared, using the Riff dialect.

"I am!" said Heriro, quietly—and added: "Don't you remember me?"

McNiell ignored the question. Indeed, it is doubtful if he heard it! For the moment he was a man with an obsession—to kill Chermanay, in his own time and in his own way!

"Then this man is mine!" he cried to Heriro. "You understand? You can do what you like with him—and with me, for that matter—afterwards, *but I have got to kill this man!*"

"That is well!" answered Heriro, gravely. "It shall be as you say!" And he issued sharp orders to his men, who fell back, staring curiously and with pleasurable anticipation. This was a scene after their own wild hearts!

McNiel bent, and pulled Chermanay roughly to his feet.

"So, you scum!" he snarled into his face. "The tables are turned, eh? Now, you inhuman dog—no, damn it, a dog is a decent, sporting animal—you foul *slug*, it's my turn! Never mind about myself, Chermanay—I'm going to avenge that poor little Arab girl and her father—and that brother of mine whom you killed with your damned brutality, and whom you left chained to me for days after he was dead! And I'm going to avenge the poor devils in the Legion, whom you've bullied and tortured and killed! I've got a personal account of my own, as you know, Chermanay—but I'll have to let that go! After all, I can only kill you once!"

Chermanay was recovering from his scare. Furthermore, although he had screamed like a child at the thought of mutilation, it became apparent that he was not such a coward in other ways! He had no fear of an ordinary death.

"So you are going to murder me, are you?" he sneered. "How gentlemanly—and how *English*!"

"Well?" McNiel retorted, promptly. "Supposing I do? You murdered that little Arab girl—as certainly as though you had done it with your own hands! You murdered all those young boys and girls, in that same village. You probably murdered the old Arab, too, after I'd been disposed of! And you'd have done worse than murder that girl—if

I'd not interfered! You murdered my brother! And you must have murdered dozens of others, in your time! Why, then, should not *you* be murdered?"

Chermanay, having no answer to this, bit his lip and was silent.

"But I'm not going to murder you!" McNiel went on. "It's not a habit of mine—besides, I'd sooner kill you in fair fight!"

Chermanay looked up, a gleam of hope in his eyes:

"Fair fight!" he sneered. "Not so fair—since, if I kill you, these dogs will certainly kill me afterwards!"

"No!" said McNiel. "You don't deserve it—but you shall have a fair show. If you kill me, the Chief here will let you go free—I'll see to that!"

He turned to Heriro, and put the matter to him in his own language. Heriro, a man and a sportsman, readily agreed.

"That's settled then!" McNiel turned briskly back to Chermanay. "Now, we'd better get to it!"

But Chermanay still objected:

"It's hardly fair, still! I am already exhausted with fighting!"

McNiel laughed, a trifle bitterly:

"And I, of course, am sweetly refreshed—after my days in the dark, chained to a corpse, eh?" he sneered. "By God, Chermanay—you want jam with it, don't you? But it is customary to grant the last wishes of a dying man," he added, grimly. "So you can have ten minutes' rest—and better make your will while you've time! See the dog

doesn't bolt!" he added, to Nippo, and strode away.

So, for ten minutes, Chermanay rested—and for ten minutes McNiel stared out over the desert and tried in vain to get his thoughts into order.

Presently the two enemies faced each other, inside a ring formed by enthusiastic and excited Riffs. Each of the antagonists was now stripped to the waist, and each grasped in his right hand an ordinary Legion cavalry-sabre.

At the word—given by Nippo—they sprang simultaneously to the attack. There were no rules and no quarter expected—it was to be just a plain fight to the death!

For a while they just circled round each other, treading warily and seeking an opening, which neither gave. Chermanay was a master of the sabre, but, by a curious stroke of poetic-justice he was slightly handicapped. For the darkness was intense, and the lanterns brought to the scene did not dispel it properly. Chermanay was hampered by this, but to McNiel, so long confined in the dark (*at Chermanay's will!*) it was an advantage—he could see better than in daylight!

Suddenly and unexpectedly Chermanay sprang in, his sabre whirling. McNiel instantly leapt backwards and sideways, but he was not quite quick enough. The extreme tip of Chermanay's weapon just flashed down his left forearm, cutting a long slash about half-an-inch deep, from which the blood spurted.

The Frenchman gave a sharp cry of triumph at sight of the blood, but McNiel only laughed quietly.

McNiel was fighting with every sense on the alert

—getting the full strength of his antagonist. Again and again Chermanay sprang in—and each time McNiel drove him back.

And then McNiel started to attack!

His sabre, caught by the shafts of light from the lanterns, made whirling circles and mad gyrations of fire in the air around the Frenchman's head—but never touched it! Chermanay's defence was magnificent! Again and again he parried attacks which would have been too much for an ordinary swordsman, and, once or twice, he even managed to drive his persistent attacker back a little.

And then—he began to tire!

Fighting with sabres is not like a duel with rapiers, or even ordinary swords. The weapons are both heavy and clumsy, and not actually intended at all for fighting afoot. The strain on wrist and upper-arm muscles, after a time, becomes terrific—and all this was felt by Chermanay.

The cheerful confidence with which he had started the combat rapidly deserted him. His arm and wrist ached intolerably, and it became increasingly difficult for him to parry the rain of blows his opponent aimed at his head. God, how he wanted a rest—just a second or two . . . !

But McNiel was giving him no rest! He was getting him just where he wanted him, and commencing to enjoy himself in the process! Sparks flew from the sabres as from fireworks, and the constant clashing of the blades was punctuated by shouts and cheers of encouragement from the Riffs who formed the ring within which the combatants fought.

The first streaks of dawn showed in the East,

and McNiel knew he must make an end—for the unaccustomed daylight would, he knew, blind him!

And Chermanay realized this, also—and once more a gleam of hope came to him. But the dawn was coming too late to save him from McNiel's vengeance. McNiel commenced to do what Nippo would have called "fancy stuff"—and Chermanay knew that his fate was sealed. Besides, he was by now far too tired to defend himself effectively even from an ordinary attack. And this was no ordinary attack!

McNiel's sabre whirled and whistled around his head, and yet never touched it, until he was so dazzled that he had to close his eyes. His parrying was by now very feeble.

Flick! McNiel's point had scored his cheek, and the blood was running down his face, mingling with the sweat that beaded his neck and torso.

Flick! With the niceness of a trained butcher, McNiel's sabre took his left ear clean off, but without so much as touching the shoulder below! This was the sort of thing to appeal to the Riffs, and they howled with delight at it!

"That's for the Arab girl!" McNiel cried tauntingly. "They used to cut off the ears of rogues, at one time. A good notion . . . !"

Flick! The Frenchman's other ear had gone in the same way, and the Riffs again shouted and cheered.

"There was another little trick they had—like this . . . !"

McNiel took a step back, knocked aside Chermanay's feeble attempt at a parry contemptuously, and then—*flick*, the extreme point of his sabre

had neatly split his opponent's nose from bridge to tip . . . !

The Riffs shrieked their delight. Chermanay, swaying on his heels, deluged in his own blood, stared around with the despairing look of a bull enduring its final torments in the arena. The first streak of gold split the dark sky above. . . .

McNiel, laughing like a fiend, swung up his sabre again. It fell, and Chermanay's left arm, severed near the shoulder at the one stroke, fell with it!

The Frenchman, with a choking groan, sank to his knees and began to sag sideways. And then, for the first time, did a gleam of compunction come to the heart of McNiel. His ensanguined blade went up again, and descended, whistling, in a terrible arc. Its edge found the drooping neck just at the right spot, and, as the body of Chermanay toppled over sideways, his head went bounding like a horrid ball away from it!

McNiel stared for a moment at the mutilated corpse of his enemy, while the Riffs cheered and yelled their admiration and delight at his gory performance. Then he flung his sabre aside, and turned away, muttering:

"God! What a filthy business! I—I must be mad . . . !"

Then came Nippo's grip on his arm:

"You were, matey—but you're better now! Done you good, that 'as—put you right, like! Now, come on—we must get on the road, *pronto!*" And, in response to McNiel's uncomprehending stare: "I've got to take you back to your *donah*, old son. Carol, you know! An' we've got to be quick about it, too . . . !"

Ten minutes later they were riding like madmen across the desert, with Nippo's followers surrounding them as an escort, and leaving the blood-soaked, smouldering ruins of France's latest outpost behind them!

Heriro, mounted on a fresh horse, rode with them, since the battle was over and the slaughter finished—and he had an aching desire to look on the happiness of the woman he loved!

CHAPTER XVIII

CONCLUSION

WHAT it was that caused Carol, hitherto so utterly apathetic, to postpone her wedding with Norton at the last moment, who shall say? It would, however, be hard to convince Carol herself that it was due to anything other than the divine intervention of Providence!

The fact remains that she did so!

It had been timed for ten o'clock. But at nine o'clock she suddenly realized that one could not, really, get married in male attire! Even if she herself was inclined to, it was more than likely that the priest would object.

In the storeroom of the cottage there was a locked trunk, and in that trunk reposed some female garments, relics of the days before she had come to the Riff country.

The trunk was under a number of other things, some of them heavy. So she had to get Norton to aid her in the task of extricating it—which made a favourable opportunity to explain to him how she felt about this matter of dress.

He accepted it with a slightly superior smile at the funny little whimsies of women. But, by the time they had got the trunk out, found the key, and opened it, it was nine forty-five. So Norton, no longer smiling quite so broadly, had to go and

explain to the priest, and ask him to be good enough to postpone the ceremony for an hour!

The priest was pleased to agree with Carol, that it was entirely unfitting for a young woman to be married in the dress of a young man. He highly commended her delicacy of thought—which was small comfort to Norton, whose eagerness to get the ceremony over was, for some reason unknown to himself, increasing to something like a fever!

When it came to trying on the clothes, Carol found that none of them fitted her. She had grown a trifle slimmer during her sojourn in the Atlas, and her womanly sense of *amour-propre* rebelled at the notion of being married in ill-fitting garments.

And so it was that the wedding had to be postponed for another two hours, while she altered a dress of white silk, and pressed it! Norton fumed, but could do nothing else.

It was a strange coincidence that, after they had both been through so much, the minds of both Carol and McNiel should, almost at the same moment, be obsessed by matters of mere clothing!

McNiel and his escort had ridden hard, pressing their horses to the very last inch of their endurance. They had ridden far into the previous night, and so it was a little late when they took the road that morning. Before they started, Nippo approached McNiel with a bundle of clothes.

"We're only an hour or two from the City, now!" he announced, "An' I reckon you'll scare the guts out of that pore gal if you turn up looking like you do at the moment! So I collared these here duds for you—they're about your size, and they'll

certainly look better than what you've got on—or what you *haven't* got on 'ud be nearer the mark!"

The garments he had collected proved to consist of a pair of *légionnaire's* breeches and riding boots, and a rough boucheron or khaki blouse.

Certainly, with these on, and his stubble of hair combed, McNiel did look a trifle more human, and less alarming.

Then they got to horse again, and rode off at speed. It was ten o'clock when they started—the hour originally fixed for Carol's wedding.

It was just after one o'clock when McNiel, Nippo, Heriro and their escort, weary from long hours in the saddle, and white with the dust of the Atlas, thundered up to the entrance-tunnel, and proceeded to file through it—and at that precise moment Carol and Norton were taking their places in front of the priest in the "parlour" of the cottage. Since, for obvious reasons, the ceremony must be kept a dead secret, Kroob, Norton's native servant, was on guard at the front door, and the windows were closely curtained with white gauze. Carol would have put off the ceremony for still longer if she could have found any reasonable excuse, but she had failed to do so.

McNiel, directed by Nippo, rode across the outskirts of the City like one possessed. Heriro galloped a little in the rear with Nippo—the rest were left far behind.

McNiel, palpitating with excitement at the thought that at long last he was to see his love once more, had a sort of feeling that none of this was real! After all that had happened it seemed so utterly impossible! He decided, gloomily, that

it must all be a dream, and that presently he would awake!

The dream-atmosphere was not decreased by the fact that, when he arrived at the cottage (and this itself, looking as though it had been transplanted from some Sussex village, was decidedly of the stuff dreams are made from!) he found his way barred by a huge Riff, armed with a rifle, who told him gruffly he could not enter! Nippo was only a short distance behind, but McNiel did not wait for his arrival. He was not going to wait for anything, now—for he had decided that if this was indeed a dream, then he would certainly get the most out of it!

He picked the Riff up, bodily, and tossed him over the hedge. Then he pushed open the door, and entered.

Or, rather, he did not enter, for he stood, like one struck dumb, on the threshold!

Facing him, at the further end of the room, was a tall, gaunt old man, in the habiliments of a priest of the Catholic Church, and with her back to McNiel stood Carol, and beside her a man, whose figure was unfamiliar to McNiel, and who had just taken her hand in his. Their attitude, and the book in the priest's hand, explained the whole scene with deadly clarity!

Carol, the woman he loved; whom he had followed across the world, and for whose sake he had endured nameless horrors, *was getting married to another man!*

On the sound of the opening door, Carol and Norton had turned quickly. To Norton the figure standing there meant nothing—beyond a sinking

sensation at his heart, and an intuition that after all, Carol was lost to him.

Carol stared, wide-eyed, at the strange, wild-looking figure standing framed in the doorway. And despite the worn, lined, scarred face, looking like that of an old man (an impression accentuated by the fact that the stubble of hair above it was dead, snowy white) and the emaciated, stooping figure, she recognized it instantly.

From her lips there burst a wild cry of:

"Jimmy! Oh, Jimmy . . . !"

But she did not move, for she, too, believing him to be dead, thought she was suffering from an hallucination!

As for McNiel, this fantastic end to his fantastic journey firmly convinced him that he was in the throes of a nightmare—or that he was still lying, delirious, in that dark cell. So it was that it struck him as funny, and he flung back his head and gave a wild, eldritch laugh that re-echoed weirdly around the little room, and was carried back to those who stood outside.

Then, still laughing, he swayed on his heels and crashed, face downwards, prone into the room, blessed insensibility bringing at last relief to his tortured nerves.

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McNiel came near to dying. Mentally and physically, he had endured, in that last twelve-months, more than any human being is capable of standing. Through the wild fever and delirium that followed his collapse Carol, with hope once more warring with anxiety in her heart, watched

and tended him, while Norton, all selfish considerations finally put aside, fought grimly and tenaciously with the Dark Stranger for the life of his rival!

Heriro, too, played his part. He had infinitely more influence over the wild and undisciplined Riffs than had Nippo, and in the confusion that followed McNiel's collapse the secret of Carol's sex was out, once and for all! Heriro selected a few men he could really trust, and these, armed to the teeth, guarded the cottage and the hospital night and day. The Catholic priest, his imagination caught by the drama in which he had become involved, stayed also.

And so there came a day when, once more, a wedding was staged in that little cottage—a Christian wedding in an English cottage, set in the heart of one of the wildest and most savage countries in the world! And, when it was over, Carol Royston and James Baird McNiel were man and wife!

By this time it was quite plain that the star of Ab-del-Krim was waning. He had put up a tremendous fight against terrible odds—and that they proved, in the long run, too strong for him was no disgrace to that brave and enlightened leader. He had already warned his few white adherents that the time had come for them to bid him farewell, and to make a bid for their own safety.

McNiel and his wife were the last to go. Nippo, of course, went with them, and Norton accompanied the party as far as the coast. Heriro had already said his farewells and had departed to take over the leadership of the Jibala tribe against the

Spaniards. For some time he was a thorn in their sides—and he actually took a cannon up into the mountains, and shelled the city of Tetuan with it, before, at the head of his men, fighting like the brave man he was, he was shot down by Spanish bullets.

Probably the last party to use Krim's "underground-railway," McNiel and the others were smuggled down to the coast, where they were taken aboard a ship for Tetuan. There Norton bade them farewell, and set off once more for "God's Own Country," while, in due course, McNiel and Carol, with the faithful Nippo in close attendance, took a boat from Gibraltar for England. Heriro had insisted on supplying his friends with money, which McNiel, knowing his altered circumstances, accepted as a loan!

During the whole of this time, nothing had been said about their future existence, until, on their first night aboard, they stood side by side against the rail, and gazed over a tumbled mass of waters turned, by the witchery of the moon, into a fairy sea.

"Have you any idea—any notion—of how we are going to exist when we get to England?" McNiel asked her.

She smiled up into his face and shook her golden curls:

"Not the faintest!" she told him, and added: "Nor do I care—so long as we are together!"

"You darling!" he whispered, as he held her close to him. And then: "Well, I've got a little surprise for you, girl o' mine! You see, you're not after all marrying a down-and-out, turned away

in disgrace from his ancestral halls! And the first thing I shall do when we get to England will be to take you to a little place called Bletchley, and to introduce you to the second most wonderful woman in the world—my mother!”

And then, for the first time, he told her the full story of all that had happened, and all that he had learned, in that dark prison-cell in the desert.

She cried a little at the pathos of it all, and then kissed him quite a lot.

“It all seems very dreadful, doesn’t it?” she whispered. “All that splendid sacrifice for nothing—and worse than nothing! And yet—it wasn’t for nothing, really! For if you had never made that sacrifice, you and I would never have met!”

McNiell laughed softly as he kissed her:

“‘Cast your bread upon the waters . . . !’” he murmured—and then, in a graver tone: “An old Arab once said something to me, which I have always remembered. He said: ‘Allah is All-Wise, and that which seems to thee, in thine ignorance, to be a disaster, is often nothing other than Opportunity in disguise!’”

“A lovely thought—and one to be cherished when things look black!” Carol answered.

“You’re right!” he said. “And, by Jove, we’ll have it graven upon our hearthstone, one of these days!”

He kept his word, for if you were to visit the McNiels in their country home to-day, you would find an ornamental brass plate let into the hearth of their favourite room—the library—bearing that legend upon it. If you asked him, the butler (who, in his unregenerate days was called “Nippo”)

would point it out to you with considerable pride. But all he could tell you about it would amount to the fact that he himself taught Master James (James Baird McNiel the Second) his letters from that same brass plate. And he would add (if he had unbent sufficiently from the dignity of his position):

"And Gawd blimey, sir, 'e ain't 'arf a nib, that one! A reglar chip o' the old block, if you get me, sir!"

THE END

